A DRAMA of the BALKAN WAR

Adventure

AUGUST

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ARGOSY IV

ALL-STORY

Arthur Sullivant Hoffman MANAGING EDITOR

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with any old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, give your own name if possible. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor.

I WOULD like to hear from Frank Miller, who lived in Ennis, Texas, in 1892. Also John and Lee Crawford, who lived in Ennis, Texas, at the same time. Harvey Morris, Co. D, 22d Inft., Texas City, Texas.

WILL Jack Prout, who was in Porcupine Camp in 1908, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE.

WILL Fred Scott, a newspaper man in the Fall of 1911 in Pensylvania, last heard of in New Orleans, communicate with R. W. Coates, care of ADVENTURE.

WILL Robert Scott Frazer, New York City, be kind enough to communicate with editor of ADVENTURE.

WM. F. MOLLENHAUER, JR., would like to communicate with Gordon Law.

Would also like to get in touch with Simon P. Culp, The Modern Munchausen. Address Wm. F. Mollenhauer, Jr., General Delivery, Owatonna, Minn.

WILL Charles Goolrick, who was discharged from the U. S. N. Hospital Corps at Norfolk in the Winter of 1902-3, advise an old shipmate of his address? Address Box 511, Johnstown, Pa.

NOT for newspaper notoriety, but that some of my old comrades may know of my whereabouts, would I ask to be admitted to your Camp-Fire; for the trouble with my eyes, which I mentioned to you in one of my letters, has become more serious, and to-day I find myself half blind, compelled to bid adieu to the roving life and only in memory live again through the wild scenes of my past life. There are no doubt some of my old shipmates and companions-in-arms who might drop me a line, should they hear of me through the Camp-Fire. F. E. VAN LEUE, Hornell, N. Y.

JACK BONHAM, born at Hastings, England; enlisted about 1900 (aged fifteen) and served six years in band of the Royal Sussex; to Sherbrooke, P. Q., Canada, with two other young men, sailing from London, March, 1906; last heard from Aug., 1906, with photo in uniform of Sherbrooke Volunteers; natural musician; favorite with his comrades. Any one having word of him please communicate at once with Mrs. Jean Bonham, care ADVENTURE.

I'D LIKE to hear from, or to know what has become of, these men who were in "E" and "C" Troops, B. S. A. P., stationed in and around Salisbury, at Hartley Hills and New Fort Martin, Rhodesia, South Africa, in 1896-1897: A. S. O'Connor, Bob Ross, Jimmie Van Damme, Anton Kufeke, Jack Griffiths, Julian Harries, Jack Gardiner. Address W. E. Prickett, care ADVENTURE.

"ELLIOT, 1st Sergeant." Kindly give me full name and address. Editor, ADVENTURE.

WILL Edward J. Raeder, last heard of in Manila, P. I., communicate with Donald F. McGrew, care ADVENTURE.

IF ANY one knows where Trafford Eckley Smith is, for the love of Mike send word to the Australian he was down the Mediterranean with in 1899. Address Australian, care ADVENTURE.

DICK MARTEL, who was in Hermosilla in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

CHARLIE SCHAEFFER, who was in Sonora in 1887, write Wm. E. Saunders, Torresdale, Phila., Pa.

WORD wanted of George Dean, of Massachusetts, who sailed on the whaling-bark *Canton* to Hudson's Bay in 1893. Address Stephen A. Reynolds, care ADVENTURE.

WISH to get into communication with Charlie Sutherland, late of Bechuanaland Police, Jameson Raid, Boer War, in charge Union Castle Line Dock at Cape Town. Address Talbot Mundy, care ADVENTURE.

Manuscripts sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

Julia A. Sill, New York; Horatio Langford King, Galveston, Texas; J. K. Livingston (no address); W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; W. Mack, Pachica, Mexico; Henry W. Edwards, New York; Daniel Morgan, Pine Bluff, Arkansas; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillions, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manson, Chicago, Cal.

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Adventure

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BOUND MAY 1943

"WATCH ME!"

A Business Romance of the Great West

by

George Frederic Stratton

CHAPTER I

DAHL'S EMPORIUM

A FULL LINE OF GENERAL MERCHANDISE WILL BE OPENED HERE ON SATURDAY NEXT

THE BAR K OUTFIT GETS BUSY

DAHL slunk back in his doorway as a party of cowboys came on a headlong dash down the street, under all the wild excitement of a job finished and dinner and fun ahead. Through a wide gap among the crude buildings which formed the main and only street of Stonycreek, Dahl saw, on a distant side-track, a string of cars loaded with cattle. Through the morning he had, with amazement and some little awe, watched those cowboys handling the range-steers; cutting out small bunches and heading them on the loading-platform.

As they reached his store they drew rein and wheeled around in front, gazing with curious eagerness at the new canvas sign:

"Doll!" shouted Bud Fanning. "Hello, Dolly!" and wild yells broke from the others. That was the christening of Philip Dahl, and for years afterward he was known all through the Tehama Valley as "Dolly."

Bobcat Charlie shouted, "You sure forgot to dot that 'I', Dolly!" and a shot from his .44 placed the dot over the vowel in "Emporium." Then, with another volley from the bunch, they plunged away.

The What Cheer saloon was just ahead, and the thought of that blotted out Dolly. That gentleman came from the shelter of some packing-cases, shaking a little, with

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tiny beads of sweat decorating his face and neck. Except in a Wild West show he had never seen a cowboy in the open.

"Who's this fellow Dahl, that's nestin' here in Stonycreek?" asked Fanning, a little later, of Jensen, the old established storekeeper.

Jensen scowled bitterly.

"Came here from Denver with a car-load of goods, an' says he's goin' to liven up this town."

"Which the same needs livening all right!" grinned Fanning. "Except when a bunch of the boys come in, every day's Sunday."

"He can't make trade, can he?" exploded Jensen so savagely as to cause Fanning to dart his hand to his hip instinctively. "He came here from the city with his city ways, an' calc'lates to scoop the trade when there ain't 'nough for one. I'm bettin' he'll meander out of here inside of six months an' have to borrow his railroad-fare or walk!"

FANNING grinned again and strolled up the street to Dahl's.

"Hello, stranger!" he greeted. "Got any cartridges?"

"I haven't opened anything yet," smiled Dahl. "The car only got in last night and the stuff's just been hauled. I'll be all ready by Saturday."

Fanning looked keenly at the young, frank, blue eyes, which he thought seemed hungry for some little friendliness.

"Prospect good?" he asked.

"Dizzy!" laughed Dahl. "It's a new country to me, but I know the business well, and I guess I can put a little salt on its tail."

"Luck to you!" said Fanning, and he crossed the street to meet some of the boys. Later in the afternoon he got a couple of them in a back room of the What Cheer, and held a short consultation which ended with:

"There's two of the freight-teams goin' back to the Thunder Creek Canyon to-night—empty. I'll meander round to see the drivers."

Dahl busied himself through the afternoon inside of his gloomy crude store. He closed the door securely, for although he was a man who would face danger if necessary, he did not court it; especially in the shape of exuberant cowboys who were entirely new to him. Once or twice vigorous kickings on that door, and shouts for "Dolly!" sent him into retreat.

Late in the evening, which he had spent in darkness in order not to attract the attention of the rollicking, shouting cowboys, he heard a steady businesslike rapping at the side door, and inquired who was there.

"Bud Fanning," was the reply. "I want to see you for a few moments."

Dahl remembered the voice, also the friendly gleam in the cowboy's eyes that afternoon. He opened the door and Fanning stepped in.

"Where's your light?" he demanded.

"Just going to touch it off," answered Dahl.

He lit a lantern, and Fanning perched upon a case.

"Thought I'd meander in an' look after you," he grinned. "The boys are some gay to-night, an' if I'm here they won't play no tricks—excessive. I'm Bud Fanning, foreman of the Bar K outfit."

"Mighty glad to see you, Mr. Fanning," gleamed Dahl, with extended hand. At the moment a rumble of heavy wagons outside stopped, and there was the sound of light horses' feet, and muffled laughter and talking. Dahl listened with evident apprehension.

"Feel like taking a ride this fine night?" grinned Fanning. Without waiting for an answer he stepped to the front door pulled away the bar and opened it. Half a dozen men clanked in, and outside in the moonlight, the alarmed Dahl saw a larger group on horses.

"QUIET, boys!" warned Fanning. "Now, Dolly, I'll tell you what's ahead of you. You ain't wanted here in Stonycreek—not excessive. An' where a man ain't wanted he don't do no good for himself nor for any one else. But you're wanted out at Thunder Canyon. There ain't no store there, an' we're goin' to move you out there."

"No you won't!" exploded Dahl. "I've leased this store and I'm going to stay here."

"Don't get peevish, Dolly!" laughed Fanning. "If you do I'll have to tell one of the boys to kiss you. Come away from that door!"

The command was emphasized by a businesslike revolver. Dolly shrank back.

"Run the stuff out, boys!" commanded Fanning. "Dolly, you stay back there and

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keep quiet. If you make a yelp, it'll have a sure queer echo," and again he oscillated his gun.

"You're simply fools!" raged Dahl. "The law will follow those goods and follow you. You know that! You're fools or drunk!"

Fanning hummed:

"There was a cute ole lawyer,
His name was Billy Snyde;
He'd prove that you were dead as Noah,
And then he'd prove he'd lied!"

Two six-horse freight-wagons were backed up and loaded with Dahl's goods. Then he was ordered to take a seat by one of the drivers and, escorted by over a dozen of the Bar K boys, they started along the thirty-mile trail to the Tehama Mountains. Dahl made vigorous protests, but they were lost in the boys' parting salute to the Stony-creek townsmen. They rode twenty miles over the rough trail before morning, and breakfasted at Wilbert's ranch. As there was but one man there besides the rancher, Dahl saw the folly of any appeal.

Then on again across the lovely, almost uninhabited desert. As they drew near to the mountains, where water was available, the land showed greener. Big tracts of alfalfa came into view, and here and there stood waist-high crops of grain. The dreary loneliness of the desert gave way to signs of life. By looking clear round the horizon, sometimes two sets of farm buildings could be seen at once.

AT THE mouth of Thunder Canyon they hauled up to a weird rough house built of heavy timbers. Fanning announced:

"There's your new Emporium, Dolly. It's big enough for a city store, an' you'll have to build a city around it to use it all. There won't be no rent as long as you behave yourself. It's the old ore-bin of the Last Chance Mine."

Dahl climbed down from the high seat and gazed at the building; not to make any estimate of its availability as a store, but solely to see if it would shelter his goods until he could take them back to Stony-creek. Starting business in that wild, sparsely settled desert, thirty miles from a railroad, and where the nearest building was the Bar K ranch-house—half a mile distant—was too absurd to waste one thought over.

The building was very heavily framed and sheathed with rough plank. There was not one window and the only doors were squares six feet from the ground, from which ore had formerly been dumped into freight-wagons. The roof was good.

The boys chopped out one opening between timbers, backed the wagons up and put his cases inside on the long-accumulated dust and débris.

"You've got a face as long an' spiky as a barbed-wire fence, Dolly," grinned Fanning. "Come over to the bunk-house now. We'll have to take care of you till you fix up a camp here."

As they rode away Dahl looked back at the gloomy building. Across the opening flaunted his canvas sign.

"You've two days yet to keep that promise, an' I guess you'll do it," laughed Fanning; but Dahl scowled bitterly.

Fanning was right. On Saturday Dahl was selling goods right from the cases. The story of his kidnapping had spread among the settlers, and up the canyon to the Last Chance Mine crew. Its cowboy audacity appealed to every man, woman and child within a day's ride.

CHAPTER II

DAHL'S DAHLHURST

FOUR weeks later, Hardcastle, the traveling-salesman for the big jobbing-house of Coyne & Cullinan strolled into the Denver office. He shook hands with the gray old bookkeeper; shouted, "Hello, Jimmy. Aiming for the top as usual?" to the alert, dapper young invoice-clerk, and entered the firm's private office.

Cullinan looked up welcomingly. "Got back, Hardcastle?"

"No, but I'm on the way," laughed the drummer. "Had some trip this time, didn't I?"

"Very fair, Gus, for this time of year."

"Yep! Found a new town, too. One that isn't on the map."

"How's that?" frowned Coyne.

"Because it's new, I guess. As new as the names on a Spring opening of cereals. It's Dahlhurst!"

"Where's Dahlhurst? I never heard of it."

"There's something to hear?" laughed Hardcastle. "You remember that young Dahl who clerked for Perkins and went out to Stonycreek to open a store? Well, when

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Dahl got his cases into that store a bunch of cowmen came into town and stole him."

"Stole him!" exclaimed Cullinan. "Come, Hardcastle, settle down! Tell us facts and reserve your fairy-tales for your wife."

"They stole him!" repeated the drummer. "Stole him and all his goods and took him thirty miles away from the railroad up into the Tehama Mountains."

"What?" groaned Coyne. "And we sold him a bill of three thousand dollars—two thousand cash, and the balance sixty days. Where do we come in?"

"That's what I wanted to find out when I got to Stonycreek. That's why you'll find on my expense account divers and several dollars charged for team to Dahlhurst. Those boys took him over there, dumped his goods into an old ore-bin, just half a mile from the nearest house, and there he is."

"Half a mile from any house!" exclaimed Coyne. "Where's the town?"

"Right there!" grinned Hardcastle. "That ore-bin is Dahlhurst. Dahl named it, and he says he'll have a town there in a year or two."

"D'ye mean to say that he's going to stay there?" howled Coyne. "He told us that he'd leased a store in Stonycreek. Why doesn't he get back there?"

Hardcastle pulled out his order-book, also his pocket-book, from which he drew a package of bills. He tossed them on the desk.

"There's the answer, Mr. Coyne. One thousand dollars to balance up—five off for thirty days. And here's a repeat-order for two thousand dollars—same terms as before; sixty days, net."

"D'ye mean to say he's selling goods out there on that desert?" gasped the astounded merchant.

"That's where that money came from. He's getting every rancher within twenty miles; and there's a bunch of four hundred miners up on the Last Chance Mines. Dahl kicked like a mule at being taken up there, but his first week's trade showed him that he's where he ought to be. I guess he's right; and you'd guess so too if you saw his day-book and the prices he's getting."

Coyne ran over the bills. "A thousand, all right. We'll fill his new order, Hardcastle. He's a bright fellow and full of business, we know. Perkins was mighty sorry to lose him."

"You bet!" gleamed the drummer. "Dahl's a star. He had to send down to Stonycreek for lumber to partition off a store; there wasn't even a floor. But he's got it fixed up in good shape now. Did all the work himself—carpentry and painting. He bought a good team from those cowboys who stole him, and he's got a driver and helper. He owns the entire town of Dahlhurst!"

The partners laughed uproariously, and Hardcastle went on:

"He drove back with me to Stonycreek—he and Bentler, the owner of the big Bar K ranch. Bentler owns the land that ore-bin stands on and twenty thousand acres thereabouts; and he'd agreed to sell Dahl two hundred acres. That's what they came into Stonycreek for."

"Do you mean to say that Dahl's already taken in money enough to buy that building and land?"

"No. Bentler agreed to take a hundred dollars down and deferred payments for the balance. Dahl controls Dahlhurst, and he says he's going to make a town there."

"You did well to go over there, Hardcastle; I mean apart from that big order. We want to keep in touch with that man. I'll write him a letter presently. But what the deuce can he build a town on? Nothing to start with; not a mill or factory, and thirty miles out on that desert—the notorious Tehama desert!"

"Hardcastle shrugged his shoulders.

"How does any town ever get started?" he retorted.

CHAPTER III

ELNA THROWS UP HER SOMBRERO

A GIRL in khaki rode up to the ore-bin, sprang to the ground as her pony almost plunged into the doorway, and tossed the reins over his head to trail on the ground—a western hitch. One gloved hand by an instant sweep straightened the jaunty sombrero she wore, and she greeted Dahl with a bewitchingly frank and innocent smile.

With her was an older sister, severely grave, who dismounted her horse with deliberation and some expression of cynicism, which, however, changed to a patronizing smile as Dahl stepped out to assist her.

"Fine morning, Miss Bentler! How you must enjoy a gallop over these glorious prairies."

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Miss Bentler shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly; but the younger sister, Elna, intensified her bewitching smile and observed enthusiastically:

"It is a glorious prairie, Mr. Dahl, and now I've got to ride up to the mine. My pony's lost a shoe and I must take him to Lundholm, the blacksmith."

Miss Bentler frowned.

"You ought not to ride up there, Elna. Let one of the boys take him up."

Elna gasped. "Let one of those rough-riders handle my pony, Carrie? I reckon not! You wouldn't, Mr. Dahl, would you?"

"It would sure be a disappointment for the pony," laughed Dahl.

Miss Bentler smiled again.

"You deal in compliments a little as well as merchandise. I want to see if you have any hat-trimmings."

"Most extensive assortment ever shown in this city," laughed Dahl. "Stunning swagger effects in Dresdens, plain and moire high-luster ribbons and plumes, furs and sealettes in infinite variety."

A ringing laugh rippled from Elna's pretty lips, with a charming saucy appreciative twinkle of her eyes at Dahl. Her sister turned sharply.

"Really, Elna! You are as boisterous as Bobcat Charlie. I see no reason for all that ebullition."

"Guess again, little sister!" rippled Elna. "Don't you see how much we owe to Mr. Dahl. He turned down Stonycreek and brought all this stupendous assortment of swagger effects out here to us poor benighted females. Try something swagger, Carrie!"

Caroline turned away with disgust. "I just want some ribbon, Mr. Dahl. A dark rich maroon, I think."

Elna would not be subdued.

"He's a business-getter, isn't he, Carrie? There's some class to this Emporium, eh! What's the answer?"

With stern disapproval her sister exclaimed:

"If your father heard you, Elna, he would be very much displeased. He would see how wofully wasted was your four years' education in Denver."

"Forget it!" chirped the wickedly tantalizing girl. "It's the way I talk to Daddy when we're riding together, and he never grouches about it. I always faze the kinks out of his eyes on a ride."

With deploring resignation, Miss Caroline turned to Dahl's little stock of ribbons, while Elna perched on a case, swinging her little tan riding-boots, and made remarks, with her eyes occasionally throwing roguish glances at Dahl. Miss Caroline selected a sober color and told how much she wanted.

"That's some giddy!" laughed her sister. "Why don't you wear a nice quiet sedate sombrero like mine?" and she tossed the hat up to the ceiling with a marvelously rapid whirl.

"You ought to have a blacksmith department in this Emporium, Mr. Dahl," she continued saucily. "Then I shouldn't have to ride up into that canyon to get my pony shod."

"I hope to have a nice little blacksmith in my stocking next Christmas," grinned Dahl sympathetically. "Then I'll put him to work."

Elna assumed a grave little meditative frown.

"He must be brown," she commanded. (Dahl was brown!) "And not so big as that giant Lundholm. And he must have a fine assortment of shoes; novelty-mixtures in French shapes and swagger effects. My pony's some fussy!"

Miss Caroline turned away hastily.

"That is enough, Elna. We will go."

There was stern lecture in her eyes and in the lines of her rather thin lips.

Elna shot a saucy gleaming glance at Dahl and strode out humming, "The half-bricks are coming, ah ha, Mama!" and in another moment she was in the saddle, loping a dozen lengths ahead of the sedate Caroline.

"Is my name Dennis, or is it Dahl?" muttered the proprietor of Dahlhurst. His whole soul was in a tumult of excited admiration for the charming little ranch-girl. He turned and gazed at the long, weird, gloomy ore-bin which his modest store-front lightened up but very little.

"She was laughing at it all, I suppose," he muttered again. "And well she might! It's an elegant block, isn't it! Trickling all over with architectural stunts and color-effects in copper-ore and dobe. Was she sneering at it or was that a real touch of sympathy in her sweet little eyes? Hold up, Phil Dahl! You're as nutty as a fifteen-cent sundae. *Wie geht's*, Lundholm!"

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A GIANT of a man had ridden up—a Hercules of bull-hide, whalebone and whip-cord. He rode one of the great Percherons from the Last Chance Mine.

"You're lookin' fine, Dolly!" he roared.

"I'm a looker, all right," laughed Dahl. "What's the use of denying it?"

Lundholm dismounted, slowly and heavily. "Got any files, Dolly? We've run short up at the forge."

"Finest line of shelf and heavy hardware ever displayed in the Last Chance Canyon," sang Dahl. "There's a couple of six-inch and one eight-inch. How'll they do?"

"They'll help," grinned the blacksmith. "Shy on stock, ain't you?"

"Big lot on the way! Been selling so fast it takes my breath away. This is sure a good market for hardware. I'll have a line of farm-implements too, pretty soon, and —er—" he grinned—"horseshoes!"

Lundholm rang out a peal of laughter which rattled the windows.

"Stick 'em on with glue, I s'pose?"

"Cement!" retorted Dahl. "The Acme, everlasting, never-failing, always-ready cement!" Then with a sudden inspiration, he took on a more businesslike tone.

"That's a jolly, Lundholm. What I'm figuring on is that you'll come down here and start a shop!"

"What's that? Smith's shop!"

"Sure! S'pose I meant delicatessen and candy? No sir-ree! Horseshoeing and general blacksmithing. All orders carefully executed with promptness and despatch."

An unexpected gleam came into the big blacksmith's eyes. Dahl noted it and rushed along:

"I'll let you have the other end of this Emporium, little brother. There's room for a dozen such shops, and you'll get all the ranch-work. They're sick of having to drive thirty miles to Stonycreek for every job, big or little."

The giant looked at Dahl, but the look was far away. Presently he said, slowly:

"I'd sure like to do that. I'm on good wages up there, but it's a poor place for my family. Five children an' no school; an' hardly a level dozen rods anywhere for a game or a walk."

"It's rotten!" agreed Dahl. "Here's where you want to be, and we'll get a school here before long. Watch me!"

Lundholm did not smile. He probably did not hear Dahl, for his mind was very busy.

"I'm gettin' good pay up there; but p'r'aps the Company 'd make a contract with me to do the shoein' right here. They've over thirty hosses, an' if we don't take them away the forge-shop 'll have to be enlarged. Work's doubled up this past year. But here! Where'll I live?"

"Build a house!" was the instant reply. "I'll sell you a lot on Main Street. Toniest location in the city. Splendid scenery and all modern improvements!"

Again the blacksmith's laugh rang out. "You're sure a seller, Dolly. Why don't you shove in electric-lights an' piped water?"

"Ain't quite limbered up yet," retorted Dahl. "But you come down here and we'll put Dahlhurst on the map in four-inch letters, and that's no dope!"

"Maybe I'll contribute a few," grinned Lundholm, climbing on the huge horse. "It sure looks temptin'!"

"It's the flossiest outlook ever looked at. That's what it is. The flossiest!"

CHAPTER IV

A PLAN AND A SPINSTER

DAHL was always a welcome visitor at the Bar K Ranch, so that when he rode over there ten days after his proposal to Lundholm, he was greeted with a volley of yells from the boys around the corral.

"Here's Dolly of Dollyhurst," shouted Bobcat. "He's sure lookin' mournful an' hungry for good ole Stonycreek. What's the joyful tidin's, Dolly?"

"Got a fresh case of 'makings.' Cool to smoke, smooth as Jersey cream, all wool and a yard wide and sold for no fault."

"Sounds like that last tobacco you had," retorted Stinger Johnson. "Smoked like the clippin's off a chap!"

"There ain't no such animile!" grinned Dahl. "Where's Bentler?"

"In the hoss-shed," answered Bobcat.

DAHL walked over and met the rancher striding from the shed in the manner of one who always gets all the room he wants.

"Hi, Dolly!" he greeted, while his corrugated face radiated welcome.

"*Wie geht's!*" laughed Dahl. "Feeling anyway grouchy to-day?"

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"Not so you'd notice!" smiled Bentler.

"I'm in luck then. I'd like to borrow ten thousand dollars to be repaid at five minutes to twelve on this date five years."

"Borrow!" exploded Bentler, with a boisterous chuckle. "You're cleanin' up every dollar there is in the valley."

"Sure I am, except that ten thousand. I haven't got that yet."

"What is it, Dolly? Just feelin' funny, or is there ore in sight?"

"Ore, Bentler! Good, fat, rich ore! I want to develop Dahlhurst plumb sudden. I've got a chance to increase its population to three or four hundred inside of three months."

"Goin' to get married?" chuckled Bentler.

Dahl winced a little. He did not want Elna or Elna's father to get the idea that he had any such intention outside of the Valley. He rather hurriedly exclaimed,

"No such luck! But I saw Mr. Arnold—the mine-superintendent—yesterday, and he said that he wished I'd get some houses built at Dahlhurst."

"For why?" demanded Bentler in surprise.

"For their married employees. He says they can take care of the single men in their boarding-house, but they have to refuse to employ any more married men, because they don't want to build more shacks for them."

Bentler's square strong forehead drew into a perplexed frown, and a gleam of sympathetic understanding came into his eyes.

"Shouldn't think they would," he growled. "It's no way for folks with families to live up there, in that wild rocky canyon."

"Just the way Arnold feels. He says that if there were cottages down here in the open, they'd tear out all those stacks."

"Well, Dahl, what are you figurin' on?"

"Bigger things than I started to tell you," exclaimed the other. His eyes were shining excitedly. "See what it means? There are over fifty married men up there now—some of them in the boarding-house. With their families, there's over two hundred people, and Arnold says they're going to increase the works at once and would rather have married men than single. They're steadier."

Bentler nodded, his gaze fixed on Dahl.

"If we could take care of them it would bring those two hundred into Dahlhurst. There'd be two hundred more inside of six months, and they'd attract others. We'd have tradespeople there and mechanics. Lundholm has arranged to build a blacksmith-shop; the Company will give him the contract to shoe all their horses."

"So you've got it started, eh?" laughed Bentler.

"It's started! Now look at the finish. A post-office next and telephone-line. And before long—a railroad! Eh, what? Isn't that going some?"

"Every herd has to be started small," exclaimed Bentler. "What do you want me to do?"

"Come in on it and help," urged Dahl. "That talk of borrowing was just an introduction. I don't want to borrow; I want a partner."

"Go on!"

"I want to put five thousand into turning that ore-bin into a hotel. You know it's high enough now for two floors. I want the ground floor—all of it—for a big department-store, and I've figured out that the upper floor will divide into twenty rooms. I've got the plan all sketched out, and five thousand will do the work."

"But about those cottages, Dahl?"

"Four-roomed cottages are what we want. They'll cost six hundred apiece. We'll build them in half-acre lots, and rent them at ten dollars a month, or sell them at a fair profit."

"It sounds pretty well," Bentler agreed. "Hi, Carrie!" he shouted to the older daughter, who was on the veranda.

SHE came across to where the two men were seated. Dahl looked eagerly for the sister, but could not see her.

"Happy to see you, Mr. Dahl," murmured Miss Bentler, with somewhat too evident an expression of pleasure.

"It's a treat to get over here," responded Dahl. "That old ore-bin hasn't grown very attractive yet."

"He's got plans for makin' it attractive," broke in her father.

Then he told her of Dahl's proposition. She clapped her hands and exclaimed,

"It's a splendid idea, father. Those people ought to be living under better conditions. You're quite a philanthropist, Mr. Dahl."

He glanced at Bentler and both laughed.

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"That may be one of the trimmings," grinned the stockman, "but the foundation is business, I reckon."

"And there'll be a school at last?" beamed the daughter.

"That'll come when there's a town to pay for it," retorted her father gravely. "We can't do everything."

"I shall take that upon myself, father," she said with rather severe decision. "I don't suppose you know, Mr. Dahl, that I have a few thousands of my own—a legacy from my dear old aunt. And I must surely see that the children here are cared for; that their education is one of the first things to be provided for."

Dahl bowed. He was somewhat stunned by this development, until he remembered that Miss Caroline had been educated in Denver and had acquired ideals.

"You'll have your way, I reckon," laughed her father. "You most always do. Well, Dolly, I guess I'll chip in! We'll go over to Stonycreek whenever you like an' get Lawyer Smiles to draw the papers."

"Fine!" gleamed Dahl. "It'll be a splendid investment, I am sure."

"And so beneficial, Mr. Dahl!" beamed Caroline. "I cannot express my admiration for your thoughtfulness."

Dahl grinned, and in his mind muttered, "Wouldn't that jar you?"

He dallied around for another hour hoping to see Elna, but she had gone to a six-mile-distant neighbor's. Caroline talked soulfully, and once when she was calling his attention to color-schemes and the perspectives of the surrounding scenery, Bud Fanning, the foreman of the Bar K, passed—a knowing twinkle in his frank brown eyes.

But Elna did not come, and Dahl had to go back to the Emporium.

"Partnership with Bentler's fine?" he muttered to himself as he settled into his saddle. "But if I've got to take that philanthropic strong-minded woman in also, I can see trouble ahead—large and embarrassing. She's good-hearted, I guess, and I might like her—as a sister—if she didn't gush so much."

He heard a gallop behind him and, turning, saw Bud Fanning.

"Had to go over to the Emporium, Dolly." Then, with twinkling eyes, he added, "Say! If you don't look out, Carrie 'll marry you, plumb quick!"

"That's pay-streak information," grinned Dahl, "and it comes straight. I suppose she's been consulting you about it!"

Fanning laughed.

"When she chips in for marriage she won't consult even her mother. I reckon she sure won't consult the victim."

"What's the matter, then? I should think she'd have picked him before this. She's old enough!"

"Sure! But she's likewise an' also plumb fussy. Cowboys don't suit her. She got ideals in Denver—I reckon that's the term—an' she's figurin' on a professional man, or a business-man; an' I think she's sure scalin' your points. If she does, you're a goner!"

"How lovely!" grinned Dahl. "My future's roped, hog-tied and branded. 'Double Bar C.'"

"You can grin," warned Fanning, "but I'm talkin'. If she gets her mind set, you'll have to take the rope or stampede plumb sudden. That's what Curley Jensen did. He was one of those college-fellows from the East, an' his dad sent him out here to grow up with the West, an' Carrie took him in hand. Yep! Curley went over to Stonycreek one day for supplies an' let Buck come back alone. Said he had a call to go to Frisco, which the same was sensible."

CHAPTER V

A TOWN IN A NIGHT

FIVE six-horse freight-wagons were engaged in hauling ore to the smelter at Stonycreek, and for the next month they brought lumber as return loads. In a big tent near the Emporium, a party of carpenters were camped, turning that lumber into cottages.

Dahl had charge of everything. Bentler had said to him: "I'll put money in, Dolly, but I can't put anything else in. My cattle take all the watching I care to do. Play it alone, my boy; you'll get the biggest share of the winnings."

If Caroline had echoed those sentiments, Dahl would have been supremely happy. He saw the great ugly ore-bin under transformation; the lower floor gleaming with an unbroken line of show-windows, while the upper floor showed modern trimmings surmounted by a sensible cornice. Up and down Main Street, little cottages were in

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course of erection, and across from the new hotel the merry ring of hammer and anvil came from Lundholm's smithy.

Caroline was on the job, however. But very few days passed when she was not around the new village; criticizing, commending and suggesting. Dahl would not have minded that—he would have welcomed it, if Elna had always accompanied her. But she seldom did. Dahl soon discovered that the masterful Caroline selected times for her visits when the spirited little ranch-girl was riding with her father, or galloping over to some outlying ranch.

But he contrived to see Elna often. Two or three times a week he went over to Bentler's ranch, to report progress and consult on future work, although he saw clearly that the old stockman had already heard everything from Caroline. And in the evenings Elna was always there, on the big broad veranda. Her saucy eyes often met his, and her saucy, pretty lips emitted slang colloquialisms which caused the esthetic Caroline to gasp.

ONE afternoon Bentler rode down to Dahlhurst alone, strode into the store office and said to Dahl.

"Dolly, sit down. There's something I've got to say to you." His strong, handsome face was set in hard lines, and the half-closed eyes denoted steady inflexible purpose.

"I've got to ask you to keep away from the ranch-house after this, Dolly. I see what I see, an' that is that you an' Elna are gettin' some interested in each other. That won't do!"

Dahl gasped with surprise; first, that his devotion to the bewitching little girl had been noticed by the old rancher, whose eyes seemed to be made solely for weather and stock; and secondly, that his devotion should meet with such stern unmistakable objection. He tried fiercely to steady his nerves, and murmured,

"I—I am sorry to hear that Mr. Bentler. Sorry and surprised. I supposed that I was welcome at your house."

"You were," said the old man gravely. "But now you're not, for the reason I've given."

"I don't understand quite," said Dahl as gravely. "It is perfectly true that I am—er—wrapped up in your little daughter. I have said nothing to her yet, but I was hoping that when I had shown better things here I could ask you for her."

There was no change in the stern face which confronted him. If anything, the corrugations became deeper; the powerful features more rigidly set.

"The future's the future," he declared. "I am talking of the present. There must be no more of this at present."

"Why?" demanded Dahl, almost despairingly. "I think I have a right to ask. What is your objection to me?"

"None," declared the rancher. "I've seen enough of you, Dahl, to have a fair estimate of your points, an' I like you well; but——"

Here he paused and fixed his keen, watchful eyes for some moments on the far distant horizon.

"I have two daughters to look out for, an' Elna's very young. I want to see Caroline married before any one ropes Elna, and what I want I most always get!"

A rush of furious indignation swept over Dahl. But with splendid effort he checked its expression, and said—slowly and impressively:

"I'll have to follow your instructions to keep away from the Bar K, Mr. Bentler, but there my docility ends! I'll marry your daughter just as soon as she and I can agree on it!"

If he had not been half-blinded by his intense feeling over it all, he would have seen an instant gleam of admiration flash into the stockman's eyes. It shaded off at once, however, and the stern imperious look came back.

"I'll see to that, Dahl."

He rose to his feet and, as he reached the door, he turned and said gravely,

"This need make no difference in our business-matters. I'm perfectly satisfied with you there. Anything else must wait."

"Not for such an indefinite future!" exploded Dahl; but without another word the old man strode to his horse, mounted and rode away.

"Eh!" gasped Dahl as he dropped back in his chair. "Am I dippy, or is this a genuine Thunder Canyon lemon? I wonder if he figured on me marrying the old maid? Well, he knows now that he's got another guess coming; a fluffy-ruffle guess with trimmings!"

Across the road, at the blacksmith-shop, he saw a man dismounting from a horse.

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It was Ayland, one of the mine-engineers, whom Dahl had met several times. His hand came down on the desk with a crash.

"Eureka!" he gasped. "The world is mine! Can't I frame that up? Is this where another gilt-edged section is added to the Dahlhurst Stupendous Department-Store? The match-making department; best husbands in the city; sixth floor, north corridor; take fourth alley to the right. Am I guessing? Well, watch me!"

HE WALKED across to the forge and greeted Ayland, whose quiet, almost solemn face lit up with a hungry welcoming gleam.

"You're surely doing some work here, Mr. Dahl. Tremendous lot of detail, yet you look hearty."

"Ought to!" laughed Dahl. "All a promoter's got to do is to gather in the profits of the first ten years and then promote something else. It's easy!"

"Yet you put in pretty heavy days, I understand. Our teamsters tell me that they often see lights in your store and office at one or two o'clock in the morning."

"That isn't in the day's work," grinned Dahl. "It's to-morrow's, and there's money in every one of my to-morrows. But say, Ayland, there are some stunts that get my goat—this architectural work, for one."

Ayland glanced at the plain little commonplace cottages, and a touch of cynicism dawned in a very guileless smile.

Dahl caught it and went on:

"No, it isn't on those cottages that I'm fazed. It's on the schoolhouse."

"The schoolhouse! Is it possible that you've got as far as that?"

"Not yet, but I'm on the way. You see, Miss Bentler—Caroline—is the patroness of the schoolhouse. She's going to build it. She's got some little fortune—I don't know how much, but she says she's going to have a building that'll appeal to the love of artistic lines—or something like that. How's that!"

"I've never had the good fortune to meet Miss Bentler, but she is evidently a tremendous acquisition to Dahlhurst."

"She's fine," gleamed Dahl. "The most thoughtful, large-hearted woman I ever met. It's simply astounding to find one with so much true refinement and—er—appreciation of the beauties to be found here, if you look for 'em."

"I have heard that she is of very superior mold," agreed Ayland. "But all that would, I should think, make your work here so much easier."

"Not on your life!" exploded Dahl. "Come over to the office and I'll show you what I'm up against."

"There!" he exclaimed as he laid several sketches before the young engineer. "There are Miss Bentler's own sketches of what she wishes for her schoolhouse; and she expects me to elaborate the details and make working-drawings, and all that. And I'm no more able to do it, Ayland, than I'm able to design a power-plant up in that canyon."

Ayland looked over the sketches admiringly.

"These are exceedingly artistic ideas," he murmured. "But, of course, as you say, some of the details require very careful work to produce the results she evidently desires. This window, for instance, is excellent; but it would be far more effective if the whole front accorded with it. Don't you think so?"

"You bet I do!" ejaculated Dahl. "Say, Ayland, wouldn't you make a drawing for me? A new full drawing of that front, carrying out her scheme exactly?"

"I should be very happy to," exclaimed the engineer. "But I am doubtful, you know, if it would be proper for me to interfere in that way. I have never even been introduced to Miss Bentler."

"You don't need it," asserted Dahl. "I'll state, of course, that you made the drawing to help me, and I know that she'll appreciate any help highly. Very highly! She knows my limit, all right, and she figures that she'll have to waste money on a real architect, but she'd sooner put it into library-books."

Ayland gasped again.

"Library! Is she really planning to include a library?"

"Surest thing you know! And she wants help. There's no one about here that understands her ideals, and I should think she'd feel some lonesome."

An intensely sympathetic gleam came into the engineer's earnest brown eyes, and he said quietly,

"I'll make the drawing, Dahl, if you really think it would not seem obtrusive in me."

"Nary an obtruse!" grinned Dahl. "It'll be as welcome to her and to me as a garage

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on the desert when the gas is out."

And as Ayland put the sketches in his pocket and walked over to his horse, the promoter did a lively two-step in the corner of the office, murmuring, "'Pity is akin to love.' First customer for the match-making department. It's too easy! It's a shame to take the money. That couple are just designed for each other. He's as nutty about perspectives and vistas and color-schemes as she is. They're like one stick of peanut-brittle, broken in half and waiting for some—er—philanthropist to join 'em up again. Whoop-ee-e!"

WHEN Ayland brought down his drawings, Dahl greeted him effusively, but as he looked over the engineer's designs he assumed a very earnest, even solemn attitude.

"This is very good of you, Ayland. You've put a lot of time in on these, and genius, too. I'm so glad for Miss Bentler's sake. She's a cosmopolitan woman in a three-man town, and she's sure lonely. She's as hungry for appreciative understanding as a coyote is for sheep. I appreciate her splendid heart and her longing to —er—put some trimmings onto the wild and woolly; but I don't know the first thing about expressing my understanding of it. I don't even know that I do understand it."

"You underrate yourself, Dahl. You understand, I'm sure, but your heart is in all this." He waved his arm toward the little collection of crude buildings. "And it's fine, Dahl! I can appreciate what achievement means, or I shouldn't be on engineering-work. It's not the work, but the way it's done that shows the man."

Good-will flashed into Dahl's eyes as he grasped the engineer's hand and wrung it heartily.

"Come on!" he exclaimed. "I'll ride over to Bentler's and introduce you. You'll have to explain these details to Miss Bentler yourself. I'd only make a hash of it."

"Are you sure that I shall be welcome?" asked Ayland hesitatingly.

"Heap sight more welcome than I'll be; and that's going some," grinned Dahl, and they rode away.

As they reached the ranch-house he saw the hard stern look come over Bentler's face. On the porch were the two daughters. Elna fondling a great collie, and Caroline with a book. Dahl did not dismount, but introduced the engineer in his characteristic way, and then, saying that his accounts were 'way behind, he rode back, getting in exchange for his one long glance at Elna a pouting stare, which, however, was on the lips only—not in the eyes.

As he swung off his hat and wheeled his horse he hummed to himself:

"Perhaps it may turn out a song,
Perhaps turn out a sermon."

For he was in an unusually sober state of mind. Ayland's pleasant words had sunk in deep. They had surprised him, because he had always estimated the engineer as coldly critical and irresponsive.

"Ah, well!" he muttered cheerfully as he reached the store, "men usually treat you as you treat them. That's pretty close to the Golden Rule, and much more practical!"

CHAPTER VI

DOLLY ASSISTS LOVE

DAYS would have melted into weeks with startling rapidity if Dahl had had nothing but his town-development on his mind. But the days were very long and exasperatingly slow in succession as he watched the progress of Ayland's and Caroline's acquaintanceship. There was nothing in it to discourage him. The engineer was at the Bar K Ranch at least once, often twice, a week; and frequently he and Caroline were in the village, debating upon the finishing touches of the schoolhouse and library.

But Dahl noted with a mixture of intense amusement and disgust the diffidence of Ayland. He treated Caroline always with rather old-fashioned courtesy; deferring to, or delicately adjusting, her suggestions or criticisms. And, although she gleamed with pleasure at every word he expressed and at his every glance, they got no closer. Dahl noticed on one occasion when Caroline handed the engineer a paper, he awkwardly grasped it at an extreme corner. He would not even let his fingers touch hers.

Dahl strolled to the end of his storeroom and exploded:

"Great Socorro! Have I got to pose them as a Welcome Soap ad., and then stretch out my arms and say, 'Bless you, my children?' She's got him, and she knows she's got him, and yet she doesn't cinch him! It

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beats all how women will play with a man."

His whole heart was in that growl. Not one moment could he get with Elna alone. When she came to Dahlhurst it was always in the company of her father or Caroline, and always on a hurried visit. Although he then made no attempt to hide his love for her, her response was, at most, a flash of her eloquently expressive eyes.

In the evenings, after fourteen or fifteen hours of hustle about his store or the new grist-mill, or the lumber-yard, he would go up to his comfortably furnished room in the Dahlhurst Hotel and gaze across to the Bar K Ranch, sometimes catching a glimpse of a khaki-clad little figure springing from her pony after a late ride. Those were his bad evenings, and they came often. Reading did not help him. Once he savagely tossed a magazine he had been trying to read into the farthest corner of the room.

"'Make opportunities!'" he exploded. "I can make them, but not to fit this case. I've balled it up, all right. If I hadn't roped Bentler into investing his money here, I could elope with that girl inside of a week. I'd make the opportunity. But here's his money and he's depending on me to make good. I can't throw him down that way. I simply can't! I'll have to cut out his paternal rot some other way. I've got to chew over the Whatness of What-might-be if it Was a Little Otherwise than What-it-is."

He slumped back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his crisp curly hair, his eyes narrowed to pin-points. After a long period without a movement his hands came slowly down to his sides. He straightened up just as deliberately, but his eyes showed lightning-flashes of inspiration and joy.

"That's—the—stunt!" he murmured with intense decision. "Ayland needs the jolt, and he's going to get it! Watch me!"

THE next day he was en route to Stonycreek, alone and with ample opportunity to formulate his plans and indulge in some joyous soliloquy. "Ayland will jump at railroad-work. He's tired of that dull mining-exploitation where the exploitation's all done. If I succeed in promoting the Stonycreek and Dahlhurst Railroad, I'll see that he's made constructing-engineer. That'll make his headquarters at Stonycreek, of course; and if he's thirty miles away from little Carrie there'll be something doing. He'll propose to her—or she to him. I don't know which, and I don't care!"

On reaching Stonycreek he sought out Thomas Henry Snowcroft, the leading capitalist of the town; also the head of the incipient Boosters' Club, formed by the business men. In his usual energetic and direct manner, he proposed the railroad. Snowcroft—silent, solemn, taciturn—listened to the entire plan without displaying one gleam of encouragement.

"What do you fellows at that end propose to do?" he demanded, as Dahl finished outlining the project.

"All we can, Mr. Snowcroft. I have not yet suggested the matter to any one—not even to my own partner, Bentler. I think that Stonycreek is vitally interested in a railroad which will open up a vast tract of new country and put it in close touch with your business interests. So, naturally, I thought best to consult you first."

A marrow-chilling smile came over Snowcroft's face, and his impassivity changed to scorn.

"I see through the scheme," he barked. "You go out there and pick up the trade with those outlying mines and ranches, and then come down here and ask Stonycreek to build a railroad to help your freighting!"

Dahl was astounded. He had never had business relations with Snowcroft, but had always understood that he was a man of public spirit and broad-minded enterprise.

"You look at it from the wrong point of view, Mr. Snowcroft. That railroad would open up the country which is tributary to you. We couldn't touch trade within fifteen or twenty miles of your town; we can't do it now. Men who have to drive come to Stonycreek—not to our village."

"That's exactly my point of view, Mr. Dahl. And I'll say right now that it's the point of view of every business-man of this town. If you promoters of that little pin-point Dahlhurst want a railroad, build it! You came in to cut into our trade, and you've diverted all you can of it, not only in general merchandise but in lumber, hardware and implements. Now you have the audacity to beg us to help you to hold that trade and increase it!"

"I'm begging nothing, Mr. Snowcroft. I have laid before you a clean square business-proposition for business-development, as promising for your town as for Dahlhurst, and I'm sorry I wasted my time."

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"So am I!" sneered the capitalist.

Dahl strode from the office more thoroughly savage than he had ever felt in his life. His face was aflame with rage, which, however, soon settled into cold hard irony. Ayland, Elna, everything was forgotten but that contemptuous sneer at "that little pin-point, Dahlhurst."

"Here's where I see myself getting busy," he growled. "Real busy! I've been loafing this past six months, or I'd have known what the sentiment was in little ole Stonycreek. I'll have to do some mixing. I'll have to change those small caps that represent Dahlhurst into four-inch block letters. I believe—I nachully believe—that I'm in with a bunch that'll back the pin-point through its little race with Stonycreek all the way to the tape. Watch me!"

CHAPTER VII

FRAMING UP A JOLT

WHEN he returned to Dahlhurst he sent a boy over to the ranch-house requesting Bentler to come down to the hotel, and when his partner arrived Dahl told him what had occurred. He knew that he would need to say but little about the evident advantage and desirability of a railroad; that Snowcroft's sneers at the new town and the surrounding country would arouse Bentler. But he was little prepared for the extent of the arousing. If a score of sheep-herders had driven their flocks upon Bentler's ranch and defied him he would not have denounced them more savagely.

"I've known Snowcroft for twenty years," he exploded, "an' he never produced the value of a suckin' calf in all that time. He lets other men do the prospectin' an' the developin', an' then comes in with a little bunch of money an' grabs all the cream. He always schemes to play the other fellow's hand without chippin' in."

"Cheer up!" grinned Dahl. "He's going to have a nice, playful, girly-girly time with us!"

"Called it 'pin-point Dahlhurst,' did he?" raved Bentler again. "The red-headed, bacon-faced, chunk of sluice-dirt! Every acre around here is worth a quarter-section of their sage-brush-littered landscape. We don't want no help from Stonycreek, Dolly! Not so you'd notice. We'll run our own railroad right through that collection of dobe they call Main Street."

"We'll hand 'em a pickle, all right!" gleamed Dahl. "But we'll make 'em come and eat it out of our hands. We don't need to carry it to them. Now look at this!"

He took from a shelf a blue-print of a map which Ayland had given him, of the country between Dahlhurst and Stonycreek, with the Tehama Mountains on the western boundary. He smoothed it out on his table, and ran his finger along the heavy line which represented the Denver and South-Eastern Railroad.

"Look at that railroad, Bentler. You see how it strikes northeast after passing Stonycreek; working much nearer to us than we are to that little one-horse berg. This map's drawn to scale."

He picked up a rule, laid it between the two towns and remarked, "See, it's a little over thirty miles to Stonycreek. Now, lay it to this point on the railroad, ten miles east of Stonycreek, and it's only twenty-two miles. That's how to run our road; twenty-two miles to build instead of thirty! And we side-step Stonycreek!"

A perplexed frown came over the stockman's face.

"That won't side-step Stonycreek, as I can see," he growled. "When we strike the main line it'll only be ten miles farther to that town—thirty-two miles in all."

"Provided always!" laughed Dahl. "What do folks go to Stonycreek for? Just to buy goods; lumber, coal, provisions and clothes. And they won't travel thirty miles to do what they can do in twenty miles."

"How can they do it in twenty miles?" demanded Bentler.

Dahl made a small circle on the line of the railroad at the point where he proposed that the new branch should connect with the main line.

"See that! That's to be a new town—Dahlhurst's annex! We'll buy a tract of land where we can get it cheap; buy it before we apply for any charter. Then we'll build a branch store there and supply every ranch and farm in the valley east of our line and all along our line. We'll catch the ranchers at both ends and all along the middle. We won't divide one dollar with Stonycreek. They'll eat pickle instead!"

"It sure looks that way!" grinned Bentler.

Dahl went on excitedly.

"We can cut Stonycreek down to a small section three or four miles around their little

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lonesomeness. At each end of that line we'll have a store as well equipped—or better—than can be found at Stonycreek; and we'll be in touch with three-fourths of the Tehama Valley. Isn't that side-stepping Snowcroft and his little roosting-place?"

"It looks good, Dolly."

"It's the loveliest little scheme that ever had figures tacked on it. We'll call that new town Bentler; and the line will be the Bentler and Dahlhurst Railroad. Stonycreek won't be in it, or on it."

"Name it after me?" gasped the stockman.

Dahl could not resist his opportunity. With mischievously twinkling eyes he chuckled,

"Either after you or your little daughter! She's a Bentler—at present!"

The old man drew down the corners of his usually good-humored mouth, but made no retort.

Dahl continued,

"I believe we can finance it easily. The cost 'll be light, for the entire country is as level as a billiard-table, and there's only one small creek to cross. There's money among the ranchers, and the Thunder Canyon Mining-Company will surely come in. Their teaming is a tremendous tax on them."

"I'll chip in pretty liberal," declared Bentler. "You get after the mine-company and I'll wrestle with the ranchers."

"Before you do a thing," warned Dahl, "go over to the railroad and see what you can do about getting some land for the town of Bentler. Freidenhagen's farm is just about at the point we want. It's only a quarter-section—one hundred and sixty acres; but that would be enough. I heard down in Stonycreek that he wanted to sell."

"I'll go over there to-morrow," asserted the stockman, crashing his hairy fist down on the table forcibly enough to splash the ink from the pot.

AN HOUR later Elna rode over to Lundholm's blacksmith shop — alone. Almost before she was off her pony Dahl had sprung across the street.

"How's this?" he exclaimed. "Where's your chaperon? You haven't discharged her, have you?"

A peculiar little twinkle came into her eyes as she replied,

"She thought she wasn't needed. We understood that you were in Stonycreek."

"I got back this morning," he smiled. He led her pony into the shop and she sauntered away from the big front door to one at the side, where she could watch the shoeing without being on the main street. As he joined her he grinned,

"I've been framing up a jolt for Ayland."

"For him! What's he been doing to you?"

"Delaying too much! I'm plotting to separate him and your chaperon."

A stern little cloud came over her face; very like her father's.

"Indeed! What interest have you in separating those two?"

"You've heard the old spiel," he smiled. " 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder!' I'm going to put Ayland through a course of absent-treatment. Guaranteed to make him worse every twenty-four hours. Great!"

A merry little peal of laughter rippled from her.

"What's the answer?" she demanded.

"The answer to that questioning look in your beau—er—your eyes? Well, I've got a hunch that if Ayland's warmed up a bit he'll nachully marry sister."

Again the twinkle came into her eyes, and again she insisted,

"You're sure bucking. That isn't the answer. What is it?"

He smiled wryly and doubtfully; and faltered a little as he replied,

"I'll have to hand it to you, I suppose. Your father has told me that Caroline must be married before you are."

Her instant flash of amazement was followed by a glow of pink that overspread her cheeks and ears, and even the tiny V-shaped space of neck above her cowboy neckerchief. She turned hastily toward the prairie, and exclaimed,

"Here's Daddy coming in, and he's riding Diogenes. He must be going over to Stonycreek."

"Who named that horse?" grinned Dahl.

"Carrie! She says he'll never stop for any man, so he must be looking for an honest one. That's the how of it!"

"He'll stop here all right," laughed Dahl. "Watch me!"

He was right. Bentler wheeled the big bay up to the side door, dismounted and slipped his arm around Elna.

"Good-by, little girl. I've got to go over

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to that friv'lous ole Stonycreek for a few days. Dolly! I want to see you in the office for a minute."

They strode across the street, leaving the girl in what she would have probably described—to herself—as a deliciously novel combination of embarrassment, realization and bewilderment.

Bentler's "minute" strung out to many. Lundholm led out her pony and she sprang into the saddle, curbing the animal's impatience long enough to tell the delighted blacksmith that he was big enough to take the pony up in his lap and tack the shoes on there. Then she rode away.

She thought of Dahl's absent-treatment scheme, but, although she understood its purpose, no hint of the railroad project had reached her, and she puzzled curiously on how such separation could be effected. She could make nothing of it, but, knowing well the resourcefulness of the brilliantly energetic promoter of Dahlhurst, she whistled gaily—she could whistle like a robin—the first bars of "Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All Its Own."

CHAPTER VII

AND THE TROT BECAME A LOPE

AT THE edge of the D. and S. E. Railroad, where it crossed Redwood Creek, a big, crudely lettered, but very distinct signboard read:

STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE!

TEN MILES FARTHER
TO
LITTLE OLE STONYCREEK

That had been placed there by a party of exuberant cowboys who had ridden down a month before to see Caroline Bentler throw out the first shovel of dirt on the construction of the Bentler and Dahlhurst Railroad, which she did in a manner that excited more admiration than any one act of hers had ever excited.

"She's a Bentler, all right!" exclaimed Bud Fanning. "Did you tumble to the free swing of those shoulders and the whirl of the dirt as it flew half-way to Stonycreek? Those muckers up at the Last Chance Mine 'd sure get out some freight for this new railroad if they had action like that!"

Close by, in a cluster of fruit-trees, stood the buildings of the former Freidenhagen farm—now the site of the new town of Bentler; and along the first five-mile stretch of the new railroad were a couple of snorting little switch-engines, moving gravel and ties.

"Pretty smooth job, Ayland!" exclaimed Dahl, who had ridden across the plain to rejoice in the quick progress of the work. "You sure know how to hunch 'em along."

The engineer made no response except by shrugging his shoulders. He turned away and gave some instructions to the gang-foreman. Dahl's optimistic eyes shaded with dull perplexity as he studied the change in Ayland's features; the unusual hard set of his jaws, the down-slant of his eyelids and the absence of any responsive gleam in his usually pleasant eyes.

"In another ninety days—or less—we'll be driving the gold spike, I guess," Dahl ventured again.

"Possibly!" was the only reply he got; and the engineer turned his back to him and strode away to the big sheep-wagon which served as his movable headquarters.

DAHL gazed after him and then turned to his horse.

"If that isn't cold-storage I'm a coyote!" he muttered. "What's wrong? Ever since the first ten days here he's been treating me that way. Treating me as if he was the head of a big department-store, and I a poor devil of a clerk on eight dollars per."

He mounted his horse and rode slowly toward Bentler, where the new store was rising above its foundations. But his mind was not on exploitation or development; it was on Ayland's curious and perplexing conduct. The engineer had welcomed his change from mining details to new construction with all the eagerness and delight of a boy getting his first engagement with an organized ball-team. And Caroline had inspired him tremendously. At one of their first talks about the railroad, she had listened to the engineer's enthusiastic plans for the construction, and had exclaimed with brilliantly gleaming eyes,

"It is all splendid! I've never yet felt the thrill of downright earnest sympathy with the real things of life, and what they mean to a man until now. When I hear you men talk—" and her gaze was fixed on Ay-

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land—"I can see the nobleness of achievement, the smashing of difficulties, the fight with obstacles, the turning of waste into use and the reclamation of desert and forest. It's fine, all of it!"

As he remembered those moments of elation Dahl growled,

"There's a grouch now, somewhere. Is it possible that he's at outs with Carrie?" But he dismissed that explanation instantly. Every Sunday Ayland came in to the Bar K Ranch, and through the day he and Caroline rode out together along the picturesque foot-hills.

"Unchaperoned at that!" he muttered. "There's nothing there. It's me that's getting the turn-down. Just poor little innocent me! Well, I'll have to crack that nut and see what's inside. This is getting serious!"

He rode on along the new track to Bentler, looked over the store-building, and then, relinquishing his first purpose to go on to Stonycreek to spend the night, he went back to the construction-gang.

"I'll have a square talk with Ayland," he considered. "I can't go on this way any longer. He must make his kicks personally and openly, if he's got any to make."

HE FOUND the engineer peering through a transit and waving his hands in the usual manner. He waited until that particular stake-level had been determined, and then said quietly,

"Ayland, come over to the office. I've got to ask you something."

The engineer gave a sharp, keen glance and then strode over to the sheep-wagon. Dahl sprang from his horse, tied him to the tongue and leaned back against the hind wheel, his elbows resting on it.

"Ayland, there's a change come over you that I'm at a loss to account for. Up until the last two or three weeks we were chums —real chums. I never came near you but what you showed a welcome. Now, I never come near you but what you show a grouch. What is it?"

Ayland looked him squarely in the eyes; his own half closed with stern indignation.

"There *is* a change in me, Dahl, and you are the cause. Just you! I always estimated you as a perfectly fair man—in friendship as well as business. I find I was mistaken."

"Go on!" muttered Dahl.

The expression on his face was now a reflection of Ayland's.

The engineer went on, with cold emphasis on every word:

"It was long ago evident to me that you and I were rivals, and I say now, plainly, that as soon as I realized that, I deeply regretted having come here. But a man's heart is not under control as his head is, and I thought that you felt as I did—that it should be a fair contest; the best man, or the luckiest, to win. If the contest had been fair you would have found me submitting to it—bitter as the result might have been. I should have congratulated you, and remained—as I once was—the stanchest friend you ever had, I believe."

"Come right to the point, for Heaven's sake!" gasped Dahl. "How have I been unfair? What have I done?"

"I believe you deliberately planned this road in order to get me on the construction and put miles between Miss Bentler and myself, while you, yourself, were close to her all the time; close to her in consultation about the developments at Dahlhurst. You planned to take that unfair advantage, both of her and of me. That is the point, Mr. Dahl!"

Dahl was overwhelmed with surprise, and with it he had to fight back an impulse to throw himself on the ground and laugh, laugh as he had never before laughed. But he did control that. The scorn and reproach in Ayland's inflexible eyes and jaws showed him the very serious side of what had struck him first as comedy.

"Ayland, is it possible that you feel that I am your rival for Caro—er—for Miss Bentler's hand?"

"I have just said it!"

"And you've been thinking that right along? It seems incredible! Why, man dear, I'm going to marry her sister Elna!"

Ayland glared. He stepped up in front of Dahl, placed a big brown hand on each shoulder and held him there in a steely grasp.

"Is it truth you are telling me?"

"Absolutely! The day after I was kidnapped and brought into this valley, Elna rode down to that old ore-bin with her father. From that day to this no other girl or woman has had one tiny crevice in my mind or heart. True? Why, it's gospel; original and unabridged!"

Ayland did not relax his grasp.

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"There's a little further explanation needed," he said. But there was a ring of hope in his tones. "If it's Miss Elna you're devoted to, why don't you ever visit her? Why aren't you ever in her company?"

Dahl winced. He could not tell Ayland the real reason; the condition Bentler had imposed—that the older sister must be married first.

"It's this way. I felt as if I ought to show some progress first. I was just a poor little store-clerk with a tiny bunch of savings when those boys brought me in here. It didn't seem to me that I was in shape to offer myself, and I didn't—I mean that I haven't—as yet."

"And you feel sure of her?" asked Ayland.

Dahl stretched his arm out toward the West.

"Look at that sun hanging over Gray Wolf Peak. I'm as sure of her as I am that that good old sun will go down behind that peak to-night the same as it's gone down for untold centuries."

Ayland's hand grasped his, and his fine brown eyes gleamed across the flat prairie to the distant outlines of the Tehama Mountains, beneath which nestled Dahlhurst and the Bar K Ranch.

"I thank God," he half-whispered, "that I was wrong; totally wrong, I'm sure. I get back the best-liked friend I ever had!"

"We're both in on that," laughed Dahl. "Guess we'd better cinch matters before there's any other misunderstanding. Things happen quick in this new West, and you might wake up some morning and find some fellow jumping your claim. Get a move on and mark the stakes."

"Your advice is good, Dahl. Why don't you take it yourself?"

"Going to!" retorted Dahl. "Prompt and immediate."

"BENTLER!" exclaimed Dahl, ten days later as they sat in the store office together; "The first train will come into Dahlhurst in sixty days from now. Likewise and also I've been congratulating Ayland on his engagement to Miss Caroline. Now hadn't you better celebrate the opening of the line with their marriage? Drive the golden spike and slip on the golden ring on the same identical day? That would be going some, eh? And it would be typically Western."

Bentler laughed cordially. "It looks good, Dolly, but I can't project in on that. They'll make their own arrangements, of course."

"Likewise and also," grinned Dahl, "we might make it a double wedding. Elna and I'll be so far accommodating, I guess."

Bentler dropped back in his chair, gasping with surprise. Dahl went on hurriedly and smilingly,

"It would sure be some classy to have the first passenger-train that runs out of here tote along a private car for a double bridal-tour. Eh, what?"

"Have you spoken to Elna?" gasped the old stockman.

"Not yet, but I'm on the way!"

Bentler stretched out his arm and grasped Dahl's hand. "There she comes now," he exclaimed. "I'll appoint you day-herd for two hours. Take a ride along the foot-hills an' get back to the house in time for supper."

Dahl glanced out and saw the girl and the pony loping across the opposite stretch of prairie. She was brave in blue serge braided; but her well-loved sombrero rested on the pretty curls. She reached the store at a gallop, reining up so sharply that the pony planted its forefeet together and slid on its tail.

"Daddy!" she rippled.

"Watch me!" cried Dahl, as he gave the stockman's hand a final squeeze; and that was the last that Bentler saw of the couple until Dahl rode into the corral leading her pony.

"It's a private car on the first train out," he said, as he again grasped his partner's hand.

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The PRISONER

A Story of the Balkan War

by

Arthur D. Howden Smith

THE same train that brought the news of her loss to Tzveta Babeshka carried the prisoners allotted to Dubnitza. Old Peter Gargilioff, the *chef de gendarmerie*, to whom they were consigned for distribution, had handed Tzveta the brief despatch from the Captain of the village company, saying that her father, Ilia, and her brother, Johanizza, were dead—killed in one of the first skirmishes between Mustapha Pasha and Kirk Kilisse.

Now she stood dumbly beside him in the village street, and watched the assignment of the prisoners to the different farms they were to work on.

It was still early in the war, and the Bulgarian country-people had not become used to the sight of long processions of prisoners such as poured over the frontier after the rout at Lule Burgas. So the village street was thronged with peasantry, women and girls, children and old men, who were staring at the line of fez-topped figures drawn up before the post-office and the gendarmerie kiosk. Old men and young men, mostly *redifs*, with a sprinkling of *nizams*, or regulars, they presented a spectacle forlorn enough to satisfy any gloating victors. Here and there was one who had been slightly wounded and whose dirty bandages were red-stained. They were not an attractive lot, and yet the village boys were manifestly disappointed at the absence of the tigerish ferocity and savageness which they had been taught to expect from all Turks.

To Tzveta they seemed all alike. She saw the long shambling line hazily, as through a mist. The brief message that Gargilioff had handed her pounded in her brain. Her father was dead, and brave young Johanizza, too, Johanizza, who had always been merriest when the village lads and maidens danced. She could scarcely credit it. And yet there were the words on the scrap of paper in her hand, written hastily with an indelible pencil. They had "been granted the felicity of offering themselves for their country's glory."

So the Captain of the village company had written. He was also the village schoolmaster, and he loved the rotund rhetoric of phrases.

How was she going to tell her little brother Petko? Again the long, shambling

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line swam before her eyes. She had completely forgotten that she had come down to the village that day for the special purpose of securing the services of one of the prisoners to help about the farm. The official notice had said that all families whose adult males were with the colors should have the privilege of utilizing the prison-labor available in their *rayons*. So she had come.

But this was forgotten in the surge of grief that had overcome her. It was not until old Peter Gargilioff tapped her gently on the shoulder that she appreciated the occasion.

"It is your turn to choose, *guspojita*," he suggested.

She gulped down her tears and looked about her in dismay. It was an unusual situation. Here were several score men, deadly enemies, who were to be taken into people's homes as servants, taken in, mind you, by families whose men, perhaps, these very prisoners had helped to kill. But they were part of the spoils of war, and as such their thrifty captors had determined to make them work for their living.

This was what Tzveta was thinking as she glanced up and down the line irresolutely. They were all Turks, she told herself, all members of the hated race that had slain her father and her brother. Probably they were all equally bad.

She gulped again, and looked to old Gargilioff for advice. He smiled at her kindly.

"Which will you have, *guspojita?* There is yet plenty of material to pick from. Do you want old timber or young?"

"Young," she answered decisively. "There is much work to be done on the farm."

She walked nearer the line. Several paces from her stood a tall young cavalryman, evidently a *nizam*, with corporal's chevrons on his sleeves. His clothes were neat, despite their raggedness, and fitted him jauntily. He stood out from the riffraff surrounding him by reason of his clean-cut face and sinewy build. He was a real Turk, one of the *Osmanli*, or conquering race, who have almost died out. Tzveta examined him closer, and noted that his face was open and pleasant.

"Where do you come from?" she asked, in broken Turkish.

"The Yemen," he answered.

"You are an Arab?"

"I am a Turk," he said proudly, "of the blood of the Prophet himself."

"Do you know anything of farm-work?"

He smiled.

"I worked on my father's farm in the oasis at Darfut before my time came to ride for the Padishah."

Tzveta turned to the old gendarmerie officer.

"I will take this one," she said

Gargilioff nodded, and made a pencil-mark on the list he held in his hand.

"A good choice," he commented. "The fellow looks well and strong."

Another gendarme came up and escorted Tzveta and her acquisition into the kiosk, where she signed the papers acknowledging the receipt of Yussef ben Hassan, corporal in the Tenth Imperial Turkish Lancers, and giving her surety for the prisoner's safety and comfort.

"You will go with this woman, and obey everything that she tells you to do," said the gendarme sharply to the Turk. "You will make no attempt to escape; you will not be permitted to handle weapons."

Yussef nodded.

"I understand," he said briefly.

"Is that all?" Tzveta asked the gendarme.

"That is all," he said. "If you have trouble with the prisoner, let us know, *guspojita*."

"Thank you," she said. "I shall have no trouble."

SHE led the way out into the street, past the disintegrating line of prisoners, and so on up the narrow track that climbed the mountainside to the plateau upon which she lived. The Turk walked behind her, stepping in her footsteps, moving with a long, easy stride that made no difficulty of the steep ascent. Curiosity was evident in his manner as he strode along, and he breathed in the fresh, pure air, fragrant with the odor of the balsam-pines, with open relish.

But his new captor paid no attention to him. She walked along, with head bent down, looking neither to right nor left. The sun was sinking over the forest-crowned western hills, painting the sky a profusion of gorgeous hues, and in the woods all about bird called to bird. Yet she walked on as if the world had ceased to be, a scrap of paper clutched fast in one hand. The prisoner glanced curiously

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at her, puckered his lips in surprise and shrugged his shoulders. He could not understand. If anybody should be sad, it was he, certainly, a captive in a strange land. But behold, it was he who was heart-free and his captor who sorrowed.

As they gained the plateau, they saw in the distance a small farmhouse of stones, with slated roof, surrounded by thatched outhouses, the whole enclosed by a stone wall, the type of dwelling one finds all through the Balkan peninsula. Nearer at hand moved a small boy, shepherding a herd of goats and several cows. He waved to them, and when they had gained the entrance to the farmyard they found him standing by the rude gateway.

"O-ho, Tzveta," he called. "So you've got him, have you? I say, what do you suppose? I've got everything ready for supper."

Tzveta looked at the boy tenderly, and the Turk saw that her eyes were laden with tears.

"Thy father and Johanizza are no more, bei-Petko," she said, with a sob. "This—this has come with the word."

She handed him the paper, leaning against the gate-post the while. The boy glanced at it, then at her, and began to weep.

"Don't—don't, bei-Petko," she begged. "I—I can't——"

Her golden head sank upon his, and the two sobbed together. Yussef ben Hassan averted his eyes, and passed on toward the house. It was strange, he said to himself. All his life he had been taught to believe these Bulgars were pigs. But in the past two weeks he had found out that they were better soldiers than the people who were called Turks nowadays, and he freely confessed to himself he was learning more. At the doorway, he paused, looked back at the boy and the girl weeping by the gate and finally entered the house.

When Tzveta and her brother came in they found him squatting in front of the fire on the hearth, before a pot of stewing meat and vegetables. The somewhat dubious arrangements for supper made by little Petko had been completed and made right; all was ready. The Turk had even milked the cows and brought up a pan of milk. There was nothing more to be done. Tzveta took all this in with a glance.

The prisoner lifted the pot from the hearth, set it on the low wooden table in the center of the room, upon which he had already placed the necessary slices of bread for trenchers, and then retired to the fireside. Tzveta and Petko took their places, and began to eat. But presently the girl glanced around uncertainly.

"Are you hungry?" she asked.

"I have not eaten to-day," the man answered quietly.

"Then sit and eat," she commanded. "You'd best eat with us. It will save trouble."

Petko looked at the near approach of the Turk with some distrust but, being a Bulgar, heart and soul, deemed it cowardly to show fear, even of a man so much larger than himself. The meal was finished in silence, and Tzveta rose to clear away the things, motioning the Turk to remain seated.

"This I will do," she said. "You have no part in it. If you are tired, my brother will get you rugs, and you may sleep on the gallery."

Yussef bowed gravely, and stalked out on the gallery, where presently he lay down under the rugs the boy brought him and dropped off to sleep. But late into the night a girl and a boy prayed in the room beside him, before a gilt ikon of the Holy Mother; prayed for the souls of the two they had lost.

II

SUCH an unconventional state of affairs would have aroused comment in any country but Bulgaria. In Bulgaria, where facts stand for what they are and people are not generally gifted with vivid imaginations, nobody thought it peculiar that a young girl and a handsome young man were thrown together under the one roof—least of all Tzveta. The man was a Turk, a prisoner; in effect, a serf. Conditions had of necessity lapsed back to the Dark Ages, when military servitude was a recognized institution.

So, to Tzveta, Hassan the Turk was nothing more than Hassan the Turk, a machine which filled the want of men to harvest the crops and make ready for the rapid approach of Winter. And partly because she could find no fault with him, partly because he slid into the scheme of things on the farm without any apparent

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effort, partly because of his lack of ostentation, it was especially easy for her to forget altogether the personal element in their companionship. Within a few days they had become accustomed to working side by side.

Of course, there was no feeling of sentiment about it. Such a fancy never entered Tzveta's head. She had other things to think about. Grief filled her thoughts for a time, then gave way to the pressing need of accomplishing the task set before her. It was no easy undertaking for a single girl with the help of one man and a boy to order all the affairs of a large farm, tend the flocks and at the same time gather in the last of the harvest before the snow came.

Yet it had to be done. All the men of Bulgaria who could carry arms were at the front that Winter, either at Tchataldja or before Adrianople, and all the food in the kingdom would be needed before the Winter was ended.

Tzveta had plenty to think about. But for all that her prisoner surprised her. She was a hard worker herself; she could work all day in the fields, from morning to night. But Hassan worked all day with her, and then, without complaint, rounded up the sheep and goats and cattle, and made all secure for the night. He had not been asked to do it. He simply had taken the work on his shoulders voluntarily, from his first day on the farm. Tzveta wondered at it vaguely, and saw to it that the man had all he could eat and a comfortable sheltered nook on the gallery to sleep in, for she believed in rewarding faithfulness. But she seldom spoke to him.

Once she noticed with surprise that he did not offer the usual prayers of the Moslem creed, with the prostrations toward Mecca; but the vagaries of Turks did not call for prolonged consideration, even had she been of a reflective turn of mind, which she was not. Tzveta was like most Bulgarians. She took things as she found them. She was a good-looking girl, and had had her share of attention, but all of the boys who had courted her had gone to the war, and enough of them were dead to drive thoughts of courtship from her mind for the time being.

So they worked side by side across the furrows and fields, gathering in the vegetables and the last of the grain and storing all the hay and forage. The Winter came a bit late that year, but it was preceded by heavy rains, which made it almost as bad as if snow were falling. Thanks to her prisoner, however, Tzveta had the work on her farm finished two days before any of her neighbors, and was actually able to help out a cousin who was not so fortunate. By the time the first snow swirled over the peaks of the Rhodopes, the farm on the plateau was as snug as could be, and Hassan was occupying himself by tending the live stock, and cutting a supply of fire-wood for the cold months.

NOW they were shut indoors more than ever, and it was inevitable that they should talk together to some extent. Little Petko had lost his fear of the Turk, and clambere over him as fearlessly as if he had been his own brother. The prisoner's vocabulary of Bulgarian words grew steadily larger, too, and sometimes the three would sit about the hearth, while Tzveta read the newspaper from Sofia, which told about the war, or the armistice, or the efforts that were being made to bring peace. And then Hassan would look sad, and sink his chin on his hand and look into the blaze.

"Why do you look like that, Hassan?" asked Petko once.

"Because the war is not over, little one," answered the Turk, smilingly. "A man longs for his own people—and here I am out of place."

He stole a glance at Tzveta, across the hearth from him, but she made no sign that she had heard him.

"But we like you here," declared Petko. "Why should you be unhappy with us?"

The Turk pursed his lips as if to whistle, but made no sound.

"You are not yet the head of your house, Petko," he reminded, gaily.

The girl aroused herself from the brown study into which she had lapsed after perusal of a long list of dead and wounded.

"Have you no one at home who looks for you?" she asked, with idle curiosity.

"Only kinsmen who hunger for my portion!" he smiled.

"No Arabian lass?" she pressed.

"Nay," he answered. "I serve one master—or mistress—at a time. My master was the Padishah. Now, I have no master —or mistress."

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"You must get one," remarked Petko, with juvenile matter-of-factness.

"Ay?" questioned Hassan, humorously. "Are they to be picked up easily, then, Master Know-all?"

"You serve Tzveta, now, don't you?" demanded the boy. "Well, then, what——"

The Turk rose hastily.

"I must see to the cattle. Lady," he said, "your pardon."

As the door closed to behind him, a whiff of the courtyard-air blew into the room, rancid with the mingled odors of animals close-huddled in a narrow enclosure.

"Ugh!" said Petko. "I shouldn't care to sleep out on the porch like Hassan."

"No?" said his sister indifferently. "I dare say he doesn't mind it. He's a Turk."

"Maybe he is a Turk, but he's all right," protested the boy. "Why don't we keep him here always, Tzveta? We need a man about the place."

"We shall have plenty of men, once the war is over," she answered. "You don't understand, Petko. Hassan is not one of us. Perhaps he hates us. I dare say he does, at the bottom of his heart."

"Nonsense!" retorted the boy, hotly.

"Well, he's a foreigner and a heathen," she said, with a smile. "Will you admit that?"

"He may be a foreigner," admitted Petko, "although there are plenty of Vlachs and mangy Greeks within a couple of kilometers of here. But he's as good a Christian as you or me—almost."

"How do you know?" she asked, in surprise.

"He told me so," said the boy. "The American missionaries converted him."

"Come," said Tzveta, abruptly. "It's late. We must go to bed, bei-Petko."

She started toward the inner room with him, but on the threshold she turned and went back to the outer door.

"Hassan," she called, "it is cold these nights. You might find it warmer within by the hearth."

III

THAT was a Winter that will be long remembered in Bulgaria. The snow came at last in soft white masses, sifting down over the mountains, blocking the passes and isolating the villages one from another. Almost all the men were out of the country, and the wolves multiplied without restriction, growing bolder and bolder because of the lack of a human check.

More terrible than the wolves even were the bands of wild Gipsies or Tziganes, who roved across the desolate countryside, looting lone farmhouses and small villages. A man's life was worth no more than the price he himself put upon it in those days, and the traveler on the road never knew from which direction danger would come.

But on the little farm on the plateau the oddly assorted household lived such a shut-in existence that the condition of the country was unknown to them. They were off the main tracks of communication, and the snow made traveling even more difficult than usual, so that none ventured to their doorway. For the three on the farm there was nothing to be gained by wading through the drifts to the village. Consequently they stayed where they were, leading an existence that differed little from day to day, feeding the stock, doing necessary chores and eating when meal-times came around.

Of course, in circumstances like these, it was no more than natural that the intimacy between the mistress of the farm and her prisoner should increase by imperceptible degrees until it had become all but familiar. There were long hours when nothing presented itself to be done, and the three—girl, man and boy—would sit about the hearth, talking and occupying their hands as best they could. Tzveta was busy with her sewing or the bandages she was making for the hospitals; Petko with his school-books, at which he studied diligently, although there was no school, because all the schoolmasters were away at the war. Hassan would be fashioning a saddle out of strips of cowhide for the youngster to use in the Spring when the dun colt would be ready for breaking.

But always Hassan was the prisoner, the alien, the enemy. There was a rear-guard of reserve which Tzveta never withdrew. Not that he ever tried to force the intimacy. Like most of the *Osmanli*, the man had a remarkable sense of dignity. And no matter how familiar the conversation became, he was always conscious of the feeling that he was a different sort of being from those with whom he sat—in their estimation. It reminded him of an ancient Bulgar folk-song that Tzveta sang, a story of the boyars or knights of the Czars of the Assen line,

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and of how one of them had taken a paynim emir and brought him to his castle, and left him in custody of his wife, and how the prisoner and the wife had fled together. It was a mournful song of many stanzas, each with the same refrain:

So from life's book this page I tear,
Of a paynim knight and a lady fair.

One night, as Tzveta sat sewing and humming "The Chant of the Emir of Adrianople," a long shrill howl broke the stillness of the house. Tzveta stopped in the midst of a line, and both Hassan and Petko stiffened like pointers who scent a quarry. Below-stairs and in the stables, it seemed as if the live stock had been hypnotized in a similar manner, for there was a pause in the stamping of hoofs, the rustling of bodies and champing of jaws.

Again the weird noise pierced the night and this time it was answered by a whole chorus of yelps, a fiendish crescendo of hungry threats. And instantly the spell of the sound was broken. The three about the hearth sprang to their feet. From the stables came a frantic chorus of whinnies, moos, bleats and whimpers, interspersed with the agonized cackling of chickens.

"Wolves!" gasped Tzveta.

Hassan nodded.

"A whole pack, too, I should say," he added.

"What shall we do?" she asked, with appeal in her voice.

"Have you any arms?"

"There is father's Mannlicher," she said. "And I think there is a pistol in my room."

She flushed somewhat as she spoke, but Hassan did not notice her.

"Good," he commented. "And ammunition—have you any of that?"

"I—I think so," she stammered. "Wait."

She flew into the back room to appear an instant later with a battered though serviceable six-shooter and a small handful of cartridges.

"This is all."

"How about the Mannlicher?" Hassan had taken the weapon down from where it hung over the hearth, and was examining it.

"We—we have no cartridges for that," she replied.

The Turk frowned.

"You'd best keep the pistol," he told her. "Petko, fill thy arms with light wood, little comrade, and follow us."

He picked a lighted brand from the fire as he spoke, and led the way down-stairs. The yelping of the wolves had grown steadily louder in volume, until now it formed a ring entirely around the house. As they stood in the doorway, they could see dark forms that squatted or slunk about just beyond the yard-gates. These barriers the wolves had been either afraid or unable to pass, but they appeared to be getting bolder with every moment. Now and then one of them would run right up to the gates and squat there on his haunches, lifting his jowl to the sky and filling the night with the mournful clamor of his plaint.

Hassan proceeded to gather wood from the stack near the door, adding to it the arm-load that Petko had brought down-stairs, and built a fire in the middle of the yard. To this he set the brand he had brought with him, and speedily had a column of flame rising in front of the house. The wolves retired a few hundred feet in evident distaste, but their gaunt forms still specked the white surface of the hill-slopes and the level of the plateau, and ever and again one of them would emit that terrible long-drawn howl like a lost soul in agony.

"They want meat," decided Hassan, at last. "Well, they shall have it."

He took the pistol from Tzveta, aimed at a group of wolves out on the roadway and fired. There was a yelp, a chorus of snarls, and then wolves came running toward the group from all over, adding their voices to the din that had broken loose.

"They want more meat," said Hassan, phlegmatically. "Well, they shall have it."

He fired all five remaining chambers directly into the mass of wolves that swirled about the remains of the one he had already shot. The shrieks that answered his shots were awful, but they were soon drowned in the snarling chorus of satisfaction that came from the rest of the pack, as willing to eat brothers as enemies.

"That should be enough for the night," remarked the Turk, handing the revolver back to the girl. "I would reload if I were you."

Then he made a hasty inspection of the stables, saw that all was tight and returned to the house. The fire blazed brightly, and by its light they could distinctly make out the snarling, yelping pack huddled about their wounded brethren, making short work

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of all that did not fight back, and dragging down the bravest, provided he had a scratch that emitted blood.

Tzveta shuddered.

"Come," she begged. "Let us go in."

"You're right," answered Hassan, as he barred the door, with the care of any family-man. "It's not a pretty sight. Tomorrow we'd best go into the village and buy some ammunition for the rifle. If the wolves are down from the hills, we may need more than a pop-gun before the Winter is over."

"I wonder if you will be with us all Winter, Hassan?" said little Petko.

"Dost crave my going?" answered the Turk, lightly.

"No," said the boy. "We want you to stay. Don't we, Tzveta?"

"I do not know how we should get along without you, Hassan!" the girl replied, seriously.

IV

THE next morning the wolves had gone, so they harnessed the dun colt's mother to the farm sleigh and Tzveta and her prisoner drove into the village after the ammunition for the Mannlicher. It was a clear frosty morning and when they were still some distance from the cluster of houses they could make out a picket of mounted gendarmes patrolling the roadway. Tzveta called a question to one of them as they passed, but his answer was blown away by the wind.

More gendarmes were in the straggling main street, all of them old men, for the young fellows had been drafted into the army. Now and then one who knew Tzveta called out to her and she nodded an answer. But she asked no more questions until she drew up before the kiosk in the main square, where she had first seen Hassan. Old Peter Gargilioff, looking very warlike with saber and revolver belted on, was standing by the door, receiving reports from several of his sergeants.

"*Os bogu, guspojita,*" he called, cheerfully. "Have you, too, decided to be sensible?"

"What do you mean?" demanded Tzveta.

"Haven't you heard the news?" he returned.

"No, what is it?"

Gargilioff blinked at her wonderingly for a moment.

"By St. Demetrius, but you're in luck to have come when you did, then," he exclaimed. "Hold on, though, where's the little fellow?"

"Back minding the farm," answered Tzveta, impatiently. "What is this mystery you keep hinting at?"

"Why, Vuk Mustafich and his Gipsy band are in the mountains not far from here. They've burned Pristip and looted the post-office there, and now we hear that they're coming through our *rayon* like a flock of locusts. We've sent word to all the outlying farms we could reach that people would best come into the village. Here you'll be safe, but we couldn't protect you at home."

Hassan noted that, although his mistress's face went white, her lips came together in a firm line.

"Abandon the farm!" she exclaimed in angry surprise. "What do you take me for, Guspodime? It is all Petko and I have, and what good would it do us to go off and leave it to be burned by the Tziganes? Never!"

"But what good will it be to you if you are dead?" answered the gendarme. "Vuk Mustafich isn't the man to let a little thing like mercy or justice interfere with his men's loot."

"I'll take care of that!" the girl retorted. "If the Gipsies burn Tzveta Babeshka's farm, they will earn the right to."

Gargilioff whistled in admiration.

"The right spirit," he admitted. "The right spirit, only——Lass, I hate to have thee take such foolhardy chances. I tell thee——"

He broke off, and shook his head.

"Nonsense," said Tzveta. "I shall be all right. By the way, I came into town for some rifle-ammunition. Where can I get it? Do I need a permit?"

"Anybody else would," replied the commander of the gendarmerie, good-naturedly. "But the rules don't apply with you, *guspojita*, and what's more you can have Government ammunition. We have plenty inside here, and there is no reason why you should pay good money at the store."

"Thank you," the girl said gratefully. "Money is scarce these days, and——"

"Say no more, say no more," interrupted Gargilioff. "It costs me nothing, and it's all in a good cause. I'd let you have a man if I dared, but my orders are strict."

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He cast a sharp look at Hassan. "By the way, how about your friend there?"

Tzveta laughed.

"He's worth more than one of your old gendarmes to me, Guspodime Peter," she replied easily. "Don't worry about my prisoner. Besides, he can understand you."

"Oh," said Gargilioff. "Well, I meant no offense. Only—well, you can't be too careful these days, and you know there was Constantin Ivanoff,—whose prisoner murdered him last week, and was off to join the Gipsies in the hills before we could pick up his trail. You can't be too careful."

"I suppose not," she admitted. "But what about my ammunition?"

"To be sure," said Gargilioff. "Sergeant," he called to one of his men, "get out a hundred rounds of Mannlicher-ammunition for the *guspojita* here. There's no news of the peace-conference," he resumed. "We don't seem to be able to agree with these Turks. What do you think of it, prisoner?"

Hassan scowled.

"Oh, you will win," he said. "There are no more Turks these days. Only a mongrel breed of Armenians, Syrians and Jews. They don't know how to fight. Bah! cattle, that's all they are!"

"Umph," grunted Gargilioff. "Then I take it you don't consider yourself one of the cattle?"

Hassan drew himself up proudly.

"No."

"Indeed he isn't," declared Tzveta warmly and with a vigor that surprised herself. "He drove away a whole pack of wolves last night."

"So?" said the old gendarme officer. "Well, *guspojita*, and you, prisoner, I meant no harm by my question. In fact, I wish all brave men well, prisoner."

Tzveta gathered up the reins.

"Don't worry about us," she remarked, with a laugh. "Vuk Mustafich and his gang won't find us an easy nut to crack. A Turk and a Bulgar side by side should make a good fight!"

She wondered at herself as soon as she had said it. She did not even know why she had said it, or why she should feel now as if she had given the old gendarme officer a chance to peer straight into her soul. All she knew was that she had experienced a sudden feeling of exhilaration with the thought of fighting beside her prisoner. She looked at Hassan and noted a pink flush in his dark cheeks as he stared off over the mare's head.

Gargilioff's voice brought her back to the present.

"You are right, *guspojita*," he was saying. "If we could ever line up with the Turks, we could beat the Austrian Kaiser. Well, let me know if anything goes wrong, and if I should hear firing out your way I'll send aid without waiting for word from you. But I hope the Gipsies will pass you by. Good luck. St. Demetrius keep you."

He watched the sleigh disappear down the village street, and then shook his head with a chuckle.

"A desert Arab," he muttered to himself. "What a breed! Cross it with the Bulgar strain, and—— What a breed! What a breed! But I'm a fool, St. Demetrius forgive me, I'm an old fool."

V

HASSAN woke up with a start. He had heard nothing, and yet a sense of the imminence of something threatening, something sinister, made the hair bristle on the back of his neck. Desert-born as he was, he had the mysterious sixth sense of the men of the wild places who can *feel* the approach of a foe. He awoke shivering, and his heart was pounding at an abnormal rate. His first realization of consciousness made him think it was a dream, however. The room was in darkness, and no sound came from beyond the closed door where Tzveta and her little brother slept.

Beside him, as he stirred in his blankets, the embers of the fire glowed dully. But the night was silent, absolutely silent. He sat up, and looked around, and for the first time he became aware of something unusual. Through the crack between the gallery-door and the lintel streamed a faint ray of light.

Hassan shook the blankets from him, reached over for the rifle, which leaned against the chimney and stepped quietly toward the door. No need to reason out the situation now. Anybody who came in the darkness of the night upon that gallery meant harm. There would be no necessity of challenging such midnight marauders. And even as these thoughts passed through his mind he heard a hand on the shutters

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of the window to the right, and a second later the door rattled softly under pressure from without.

The Turk hardly dared to breathe. What should he do? He did not know how many there were outside on the gallery. Were there enough to—— He applied his ear to a crack in the door and listened. Now he caught a faint whispering and the soft patter of sandaled feet. Judging by these noises there were only a few without, probably not more than two or three. He was enough of an Arab to sense the probable tactics of the marauders. While a couple sneaked in quietly to butcher the inmates in their sleep, the rest would wait outside. These would be the best tactics, he reasoned. And as he thought, a thin knife-blade was slipped through the crack between the door and the jamb and maneuvered in an effort to raise up the bolt, while simultaneously the door bulged inward under the thrust of a man's shoulder.

This was Hassan's cue. He marked where the shoulder must be, aimed his rifle and fired. Then he flung the door open, almost before the scream of pain from the wounded man had ceased. A tall sinewy Gipsy, in garish turban, knife in one hand and pistol in the other, confronted him. On the floor rolled the man he had shot.

Hassan fired again, before the other man had really seen him, and the tall Gipsy dropped. The Turk stepped outside, peering about the dim recesses of the gallery. It appeared to be empty, and he turned to reënter, when suddenly a dark shadow leaped at his throat, and he found himself fighting desperately to ward off a long, gleaming knife that cut angry circles through the gloom.

He had dropped his gun in his surprise and concentrated all his efforts upon the capture of his antagonist's knife-hand. It was no easy task, for there was plenty of diversion. From a dark mass of men and horses just outside the gate came a series of yells and outcries.

Inside the house he heard the frightened exclamations of Tzveta and Petko, aroused from their sleep by the crash of his Mannlicher. But these last sounds served to make Hassan fight all the harder. And at last he was rewarded. He had the fingers of one hand around the wrist of the Gipsy's knife-hand, and with the other he sought to capture permanently the talon-like claws that clutched constantly at his throat.

It was not easy in the darkness, but almost by accident his fingers found their hold, closed, and the fight was ended. With a single mighty heave, Hassan tossed his enemy to the floor, turned the knife in its owner's hand, and swept it down in a slicing cut that ended in a yell of agony. He groped for his rifle, and scrambled to his feet to find himself facing Tzveta and the boy huddled in the doorway and staring at the shambles on the gallery in wide-eyed amazement.

At the same time a shot rang out, and the "pah-pah-pah" of rifles rippled in a regular volley that sent the bullets whispering through the walls of the house. Below in the stables a goat was hit and its bleating frenzies set all the other animals to bellowing with fear.

"Back, get back inside!" called Hassan to his charges. "Get back and stay down on the floor!"

THEY obeyed him mechanically and he followed suit, first crawling across the gallery from one body to another to make sure that all the Gipsies were really dead. He was busy removing their revolvers and ammunition-belts when the touch of a hand on his shoulder brought him to his feet with a jump. It was Tzveta, revolver in hand, her hair streaming down her back as he had never seen it before.

"I am not afraid," she said. "What can I do?"

"Help me throw these swine into the yard," he answered.

They took the three Gipsies, head and foot, and heaved them over the gallery-railing into the yard below. But the bullets were coming faster than ever, and Hassan knew the open gallery was no place to be. Throwing his arms around Tzveta, to protect her, he rushed her back into the house, where Petko, without orders, was already stacking furniture to form a barricade. Like all country houses in the wilder parts of Bulgaria, its windows had been loopholed in anticipation of just such an emergency.

The girl was flushed and panting from the exertion, but she did not show a trace of fear as she crouched beside Hassan, close to the floor, out of range of the bullets that combed the room at a height of four or five feet.

"How many are there?" she asked.

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"I do not know," he said. "Come, let us see."

He crawled with her to a window at the end of the house, fronting the road, and through a couple of loopholes they made out a dark clump that stood out fairly distinct against the white surface of the road. There must have been forty or fifty men in it, and it seemed to spurt fire in the direction of the house.

"Fools!" exclaimed Hassan. "Lady, shall we give them a lesson?"

He raised his rifle as he spoke. There were three shots in the magazine, and he placed an additional clip of cartridges on the floor beside him. She nodded and brought her revolver to bear on the group. Then he gave the word and they lashed the night with the quick staccato reports of their fusillade. The Gipsies broke for cover before Hassan could jam the fresh clip into his chamber, but he used its contents to great advantage in spraying the fleeing assailants, while Tzveta, firing slowly and deliberately, as every Bulgarian girl is taught to do, brought down two men and crippled several others.

"Good shooting!" commented the Turk with a chuckle. "But now we must change places."

The instinct of the desert told him that they must not fire twice from the same spot, and so, after interposing himself between her and the wall, he crawled with her toward another corner. Before they had gone half-way though, there came a cry from Petko, who had possessed himself of one of the captured pistols and was proudly mounting guard in the rear room.

"Hi!" he cried. "They are coming on this side, Hassan! Come on, Tzveta! Come and help me."

The girl and her prisoner fairly raced across the room on their hands and knees. He made better time than she did, because his clothes were more convenient for such work, but she laughed when she tore her skirt, and slipped along somehow, clutching the trigger-guard of her revolver between her teeth. There was no longer any trace of the attitude of prisoner and captor. When he stopped to give her a hand through the doorway and on the sleeping-platform in the room beyond, their eyes met frankly and neither strove to conceal the secret each told the other. And they laughed as if they were playing some amusing game.

In the meantime Petko had been pulling the trigger of his gun as fast as he could, dancing around frantically and exclaiming: "I got him!" "There he goes!" and such triumphal remarks. Hassan took him good-naturedly by the scruff of the neck and hauled him to the floor.

"Little donkey," said the Turk, in his halting Bulgarian, "dost want a Gipsy bullet for a locket? Down on the floor with the wise ones!"

But there was no time to spare for pleasantries. The light was not so good on this side and, taking advantage of all the cover they could find, the Gipsies had worked themselves forward so close to the house that they were throwing gasoline bombs at the stable roofs. Presently one of these landed, and a thin trail of black smoke began to rise. Hassan ran into the next room, seized his blankets, then darted across the gallery, running as low as he could, vaulted the railing and landed easily upon the thatched roof of the nearest outhouse.

For a single instant he was within fair range of the enemy. Then he dropped behind the peaked center of the roof and worked his way toward where the gasoline was beginning to spread over the thatch. The bullets were whimpering all about him, snicking through the grass of the thatch and striking the walls with an ugly "thut." But Hassan paid no attention to them. He clouted the blaze vigorously with his heavy woolen blankets, quenching the flames where he could, and tearing out the thatch wherever he encountered any resistance.

Up-stairs, Tzveta and Petko were doing the best they could to cover him, but their fire necessarily had small effect upon that crowd of forty men. The Turk breathed a sigh of relief when he dropped off the roof into the yard, and was able to make a break for the gallery-stairs. The frenzied animals in the stalls were making such an uproar that he could not hear anything, and so Tzveta's shout of warning went unheeded. His hurry also prevented him from noticing the rush of a couple of men through the yard-gates. The first he knew of this unexpected attack was the shock of a bullet through his hip, which tumbled him in a heap on the stairs.

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WAVING their crooked simitars, the Gipsies dashed in to finish him. But Tzveta was equal to the occasion. With the Mannlicher in her hands, she ran out on the gallery and, heedless of the sniping that was going on uninterruptedly, she opened fire on the men coming through the yard. They stopped to fire back, and she ducked through the trap that led to the stairs, dropping by Hassan's side. He was badly hit and bleeding hard, she saw at a glance; yet he managed to grin faintly, and motioned to let him have her revolver.

She gave it to him, but in her desperation she took up a stand directly in front of him, so that he could not shoot without hitting her. Her magazine was empty, and she did not know exactly how she was going to face the attack.

But just as the assailants discovered that she had come down to them, instead of remaining up-stairs, a shattering roll of firing drowned out the rattle of the Gipsies' fusillade. Louder it swelled, and louder, and presently, the shrilling of Gipsy whistles sounded the signal to retire, and men came running from all over the fields, to mount their horses in the road, and ride furiously toward the hills.

One of the men facing Tzveta heeded the call, but his companion, with an imprecation, rushed in to finish the job, anticipating no great difficulty in killing a girl and a wounded man. Tzveta was ready for him, though. With feet wide apart and rifle clutched easily by the barrel, she stood waiting, and as soon as he came within reach of the swing of her piece she struck—a crashing sideways blow that broke down the guard he hastily interposed and smashed his skull as you crack an egg. Then she sank in a weeping heap upon the floor, and gathered Hassan's head into her arms.

Little Petko came down, too. But after a hasty glance to reassure himself that both were alive, he was unable longer to restrain his curiosity and ran out to the gates to watch old Gargilioff and his gendarmes chasing the bandits toward the hills. So when Gargilioff himself rode into the yard and dismounted, he found the girl and her prisoner still sitting on the stairs all alone. To be sure, Hassan had been shifted to a more comfortable position and his wound was roughly bandaged. But his head was again in Tzveta's lap.

GARGILIOFF took in the situation at a glance.

"Umph," he said. "So I have come too late after all? It is Papa Georgioff you want, not a gendarme."

"Yes," said Tzveta, in matter-of-fact tones. "Hassan says he will stay—and we need a man about the house, bei-Petko and I."

Gargilioff pulled his whiskers and glared at Hassan benevolently.

"So, prisoner, you would be a Bulgar?" he inquired.

Hassan nodded.

"It is my mistress's will," he said, with a smile.

"Are you Christian?"

"Yes."

"Well, you've made a good beginning as a Bulgar," commented the old gendarme officer. "A good beginning, pris—er, Guspodine Hassan. A good beginning." He cast a look around at the dead bodies in the yard. "You seem to have crippled our friend Vuk Mustafich enough to teach him to stay away from this district. It will make him understand that we have an efficient gendarmerie. It will look well in the papers. His Majesty will be aware that all the fighting isn't being done by his soldiers at the front. Pris—er, Guspodine Hassan, I shall be glad to endorse your application to the Prefect."

And that was how Yussef ben Hassan, corporal in the Tenth Imperial Turkish Lancers, became a Bulgarian before the war was ended. He was not a renegade in the ordinary sense of the word, for something a great deal stronger than force of arms had overpowered him.

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THE SUPER-THIRD DEGREE

by Frank Blighton

THE dead man stared with his sightless eyes up at the living men who gazed down at him. As he lay there, nearing the transition-point where the pulsing, glowing life which has forever fled its abiding-place is to be shortly replaced by disintegration and corruption, his face wore a smile of insolent and loveless pride.

The blow had crushed in the bone of the forehead, a little above and slightly toward the ear near the right eye.

Police Chief Patrick Kenefick, his son Daniel, plain-clothes-men Lezinsky, Davis and Harvey silently scrutinized the body. Outside was Seraphina Wilkins, widow, waiting their verdict. It was her tremulous announcement over the telephone that there was a dead man in her house and that he had been murdered which had brought them hurrying to the room.

The four men silently followed the chief back into the sitting-room, where Mrs. Wilkins nervously awaited their coming. She was just a plain, hard-featured, poverty-stricken woman, between forty-five and fifty years of age. They all knew her, and her reputation for rectitude and honesty was proverbial in Auburn, where she had lived for twenty years.

"You say you rented this room to this man, who said his name was William Channing," began the chief, "some ten days ago?"

The woman nodded, glancing from one to the other of the sternly impassive subordinates, her eyes resting last on the eager, enthusiastic face of the young man. The chief's son seemed the least impressed of all by the grisly ghastliness of the proceeding. His alert ears eagerly drank in every incident of the conversation, his restless

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eyes scanned every detail of the poor little home, as if he would read, in the faded rag-carpet of the sitting-room or the dingy paper on the walls, the story of the mystery which his father and the other men of the force were trying to resolve.

"You say he came in reply to your advertisement and paid you three dollars a week for the room," went on the elder Kenefick. "You don't know anything about his business, except he said it was confidential and that sometimes men came to see him; that the last two who came were here yesterday, some time between two o'clock—when you were out weeding the garden—and four o'clock, when you heard the three talking as you went to the store for a pound of butter. You didn't hear them when you came back, but you thought the front door closed while you were in the kitchen getting supper. You then heard the front gate slam. A man in gray clothes walked out, turned to the left toward Main Street and you found this fellow dead when you went in to sweep the room this morning. That's all, is it?"

The Widow Wilkins gave signs of more hysteria.

"That's everything," she sobbed. "But I can't hardly think at all, Mr. Kenefick, when I remember that he laid there dead last night and me all alone in the next room. It makes me cold all over."

Pat Kenefick was bred in the stolid routine of police duty—the routine which solves mysteries by chance clues. Now he fancied from the woman's answer that he might get a toe-hold on this.

"How do you know he laid there dead all night if you didn't go into the room until this morning?"

"There wasn't a sound from the room all evening or this morning. Mr. Channing didn't expect to stay here nights—there wasn't even a bed in his room—nothing but the table for his papers, and the three chairs that are in there now. If he had been in there last night or come in this morning, I would have heard him, wouldn't I?"

Kenefick's surmise was shattered by the logic of the answer. He gave the signal for further action by rising ponderously from his seat.

"Well, Mrs. Wilkins, you better go out and feed the chickens. We'll take another look at the body and see what we can pick up in the way of information."

Wiping her tired eyes on her apron, the woman complied. When she had gone, the chief abruptly energized with the urge of the problem before him and his habitual lethargy vanished.

"Lezinsky, you and Davis say there isn't a trace of a poker or a hammer or a club around here that would fit that head. You've frisked the house from cellar to garret, and piked off the back yard and alley? You, Harvey, are sure there ain't any tracks in the flower-beds under the window, where some one might have climbed in and out? Well, we can't sit around here all day, snoozing away the time. The two of you had better throw out a drag around the railroad-yards and run in every suspect or tramp you can glom. Harvey, you better float down through the tenderloin and see if you can get any more of 'em. I'll telephone the coroner after another look at the body."

KENEFICK ambled heavily into the front room again. It was so plainly furnished that it spoke eloquently of the poverty of the owner. A cheap, rectangular table, of the kind sold by stores for kitchen use, three chairs, a mirror and two small framed pictures on the walls were all the furniture it contained.

The dead man lay at full length on the floor, his right hand clutching a pencil. His left knee was drawn up slightly and the forehead was stained and smeared with the blood which had streamed from the death-blow.

On the table lay an Auburn newspaper, a few penciled figures on the margin. The three chairs stood as if just left by the three occupants.

That was absolutely all. Patrick Kenefick appraised the barren room, the dead man and the soiled newspaper sarcastically. He turned to his son, whose twitching face betrayed his unflagging interest in the tragedy—a tragedy where the circumstances became to the younger man's mind only so many mechanical factors, now in disorder, and only needing to be replaced in their right sequence to spell the very name of the man who had murdered another.

The father's gaze wandered from the obviously meager data upon which he must begin work to the face of his son. He watched him out of the tail of his eye. They were the antithesis of each other, these

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two. The chief's heavy physique reflected a brain in which ideas incubated slowly and traveled ponderously when they came to life. With him, solving a crime was always the same. Invariably he must first find something tangible, then something human. Then he would patiently fit the man to the thing. He had won his way up by patience, pertinacity; by plain, ordinary, unimaginative "plugging."

He made no pretensions to being either original or brilliant in police business. Under the probe of a reporter's searching questions he was always reticent. That helped to hide his limitations. But more than once petty thieves, clever yeggs and, in several instances, ingeniously planned crimes, had fallen down beneath his dogged determination, his crude deductions as events unfolded and his natural faculty for entrapping a voluble liar. It was a case of the hare and the tortoise when he grappled with a suspect. And usually the slow-moving chief outran the crook, if he had him safely in his clutches.

Dan was at once his pride and his greatest source of worry. Dan wanted to be a policeman—to throw aside the opportunities which he had gained by a thorough education. Mysteries fell naturally into Dan's mental moods, where they irritated and often baffled the senior Kenefick's coarser mind-fiber. The youth loved an intrigue. Even tales of fiction fascinated him—not the language of the story, but the mechanics of the affair. Here was a crime without a tangible clue to the perpetrator. Kenefick, chief, sighed inwardly as his practised eye noted that the boy was already regarding his own almost hopeless task as eagerly as a youth in his puppy days runs to meet the girl whose smile has enchanted him.

"Danny," said he heavily, "you're always begging to be a detective. Now you can see what it means to be a police officer. There's a dead man. Yon's a table, a newspaper and three chairs. Look at that fellow on the floor. He's laughing at me, right now—and him dead! Do you see him grin? That grin's on me, lad. He knows I'm sworn to uphold the law. He knows I'm going to have a mighty hard time trying to land the guy that done this. Look at him!"

He could have bitten his tongue as his son's face flamed red with the blood which flooded it. He wanted to depress the youth with the ghastliness of the scene; wanted to awe him with the horror, the hopelessness of the problem. But Dan's eyes, instead of distending with the fear that most men feel in the presence of a violent death, only glowed brighter with the fire within. His nervous fingers, betraying his sensitive temperament, played lightly back and forward as he bent over the body.

The eyes of the corpse surely did seem to hold a sneer at the futility of police effort. Their dull gleam derided the latent ability of the man who had spoken. That insolent smile not only mocked the fatal darkness which had followed hard on the fading life, but to the young man it seemed to challenge either father or son to find and punish the one who had been guilty of the supreme transgression of murder.

II

WITHOUT replying, Dan boldly thrust his hand into the clothing of the corpse. He searched every pocket, turning each inside out, then replacing the contents. He drew out a small roll of bills, a bunch of keys, a pocket-knife, a memorandum-book filled with tables of interest-rates, and a cheap watch.

"Well, the motive wasn't robbery, anyway," said he, laying them on the table as he finished.

The chief's face flushed. He was angry, but he was also proud of Danny—his boy. So he calmed his voice to professional aggressiveness, as he replied,

"How do you know it wasn't robbery?"

The boy straightened, pointing to the money on the table.

"If they were killing a man for money, they'd have taken all the coin when they frisked him," said he coldly.

"Mebbe he had a big roll," hazarded Patrick.

Dan shook his head, while his eyes traveled slowly over the room, noting the floor, the angle of the chairs, the table and the position of the dead man's body.

"If he had plenty of money, why did he hire a cheap room like this to meet people?" he retorted.

"Perhaps he didn't want to be seen talking with them."

"Maybe," assented his son dubiously. "But we have no reason for thinking that.

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He didn't give the woman any orders about not seeing who came in here to meet him. On the other hand, of course, he may not have cared whether she saw them or not—while he might have cared whether other people in Auburn knew what was going on. Auburn's only got thirty thousand population, and most of them like to talk about other people's affairs!"

The chief nodded indulgently. He admired Danny's terse conclusions, and he was a little shamefaced at the thought that he had not searched the pockets ahead of his son. The boy was scanning the newspaper on the table, and pursing his lips as he studied the figures on its margin.

"Did you know him, father?"

"His face looks familiar, but I can't seem to place him," replied the chief, his brow contracting as he puzzled.

The scurrying of feet on the graveled walk brought him suddenly out of his reverie. Three alert young men were entering the house without the formality of knocking.

Kenefick, senior, turned to his son and heir with a wry grimace.

"The mystery is likely to be solved right away, son," said he. "Here come the reporters. If we don't have the man inside of three hours, they'll be pannin' your poor old dad to a rich Dutch brown in the night extras!"

"Hello!" exulted the foremost. "So Billy Freeman—the William Channing Freeman that used to be, until he blew his hundred thousand dollars and turned note-broker—has cashed! Fine billiards!"

"Got the murderer?" blithely chirruped another.

"Sure, Kenefick's got him," gibed in the third. "Can't you see he's all ready to give the suspect the third degree?"

Patrick Kenefick pulled down his professional mask and set his face hard. He stepped to the door, and held it wide. The three young men made gestures of mock dismay.

"You'll have to beat it, boys," said the chief. "I'll be ready for interviews at my office at noon," he heavily concluded.

He locked the door as they went out, and turned again to his son, whose keen eyes watched them trail slowly down the graveled walk. They knew that Pat Kenefick was slow, but he brooked no interference and, besides, he was a man of his word.

"That's the first real sensible thing I've seen you do, dad," chided the boy. He pointed to the corpse with his long, spatulate forefinger. "You've been chief of police of Auburn for twenty-five of the thirty years you've been on the force. And you couldn't 'make' this man," he concluded, reproachfully. "I'm surprised at you, father."

"I guess I'm getting old, Danny," muttered the chief. "But he don't look much like the giddy boy who used to drive his auto through the ordinances a few years back. His hair is gray where it used to be brown, his face has lines that it never had when I used to pull him for speedin', or smashin' the dishes in the Grand Grill. I guess I've been too busy watching the ratholes around this junction-town to notice him growing old."

"Well, we're started," commented the son. "We've got the other end of his real name and we know what he did for a living. Now, what're you going to do to get the man who killed him?"

Patrick shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'll send the boys out to hunt up his friends when they report, and see if they can tell us anything about the people he might have been doing business with lately. While they're scouting around, I'll put the suspects over the jumps at the station. Mebbe we'll get a pick-up that way and can run it down. But it's a mighty blind trail, Danny, so far."

DAN flashed a wondrous smile across the table at his father. That smile was pregnant with confidence. The boy smiled like an experienced man who is sure of his ground. It was the superior smile of one who watches another blindly groping for what he has already found. The smile died, but certitude replaced it as he looked steadily into the brooding eyes of the older man.

"Dad, I'm glad we're alone," began the boy softly. "Now I know mighty little about police business, but if I knew as much as you ought to know from the experience you've had, I wouldn't go plugging off after evidence that I might not find when practically the whole case was spread out right here. Can't you read it? Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face. All you have to do is to pick it up, put it together—and go out and put the cuffs on

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the wrists of the man who killed William Chandler Freeman. And that goes!"

"How are you to get a man without any evidence?" truculently snapped the chief. "If he'd been killed with a gun, we might pick up something from the size of the bullet or from somebody who might have heard the shot. If it was poison, we might trace that, too. But here's a man—dead. Somebody killed him. I don't know who done it. I don't know what they done it with. And how am I going to find out by buttin' my head around a bare room?"

"The newspapers beat you to it on the fellow's name," flashed back his son. "Do you want them to beat you to the man who did it? Of course not. But all four of you coppers don't seem to see anything. Look at that dub Harvey. He frisked the front yard, and couldn't find a trace. Now I came up the walk with the rest of you and I saw——"

"What did you see?" demanded his father.

Kenefick, senior, was growing nettled. His irritation had begun with the searching of the body. He knew he should have done that himself. But his jaded brain-cells made nothing of the little pile of personal effects on the table and it was perfectly obvious to him that he must have more facts before he could progress further.

"Never mind what I saw on the walk—just yet," slowly replied the younger man. "But there's a lot here for you—a whole lot—if you'll take the time to look it over. You haven't begun to think on it at all, yet. Back in high school they taught us that a known fact wasn't everything. The man who invented numbers didn't have a fact with which to begin. Yet out of ten signs which somebody imagined, they built counting, addition, subtraction and then arithmetic, which the whole world uses every day. Suppose we start that way here; filling out what we don't know with imagination—pure imagination."

Kenefick smiled tolerantly.

"I've seen other men almost as enthusiastic as you. But while I like the book, outside of the covers I ain't strong for this Sherlock Holmes stuff!"

Dan was leaning across the table now, projecting a long forefinger at his father. There was power in the square end of it. It seemed freighted with authority. There was something masterful in the way the youth confronted the veteran.

That forefinger comforted Pat Kenefick, although he couldn't have told why. Far back in his round head, ideas were buzzing. Criticism of a police officer grows like a colony of bacteria. Already the quiet village would be teeming with gossip about folks being murdered in widows' houses without a sound, and vanishing without a trace. Pat had his record to think of—three decades of unsullied protection which he had accorded to Auburn until now.

"WE'VE got nothing, apparently," went on the even voice of his son, "from which to work. But you and I, together, without going outside of this room, are going to pick the man who killed William Channing Freeman out of the thirty-thousand-odd men, women and children of Auburn. We're going to build up a case, using imagination for the facts we haven't got. You're going to recognize him, going to go out to arrest him. You're going to confront him with a case so strong that he'll confess. I can't do it alone. I don't know enough. You can't do it the way you expected to do it—and you didn't really think you could—did you?"

"No!"

The monosyllable fell without hesitation.

"Then," briskly continued the young man, "forget that dead man. Forget that wound. Forget that widow mooning around here. Shove yourself back into yesterday, anywhere between three and five o'clock. Look through those windows into this room, where three men sit talking. What are they talking about?"

"I don't know," sullenly answered the chief, lighting a cigar.

A flicker of a smile traversed his face, a wistful smile, as he turned his head aside under pretext of shading the match from the draft.

"He gets that hot, speedy style of talkin' from his mother—he's Kate all over again," mused Kenefick, senior, tenderly.

But aloud he said only,

"What else? Shoot, kid. I'm listening."

"We've got to start with the fact that Freeman was killed by a man. He didn't have women-callers. The widow is telling the truth. She did advertise the room. She's advertising yet, here——" he trailed off, jerking open the paper, his finger swiftly trailing down the column headed "Furnished rooms to rent."

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"There's her ad. Channing hired this room—he was Channing to her, but his real name was Freeman. Why did he use only two-thirds of his name?"

Kenefick, senior, slowly shook his head.

"Because his business was confidential," blazed back the boy. "He was a note-broker—he got money for people who needed it, from private parties, on commercial paper. He was under cover on most of these deals. That's why he came here, instead of a hotel down-town. He wanted privacy. So we've got to assume that, of the three men here yesterday afternoon, one was Freeman, another a borrower and the last a lender. Here they sit, talking. Mrs. Wilkins is somewhere out in the back yard. They are talking over the loan, figuring the amount, the time it's to run and the interest."

"How do you know they wasn't plottin' to rob a bank?" skeptically interrogated his father.

Dan laughed, derisively pointing to the margin of the newspaper, where the penciled figures showed plainly, then down at the pencil in the dead man's hand.

"That's almost as bad as the way you fellows passed up the gravel walk—and what it told to any one who cared to listen to it talk! There's the book with interest-tables. Freeman is a note-broker! Look at this."

He thrust the paper toward his father.

"They were discussing a loan of thirty thousand dollars. If they'd been planning to rob a bank of thirty thousand dollars, if it had been a scheme with the three of them to stick up the cashier or blow the box, wouldn't they be figuring how to split thirty thousand three ways? What would Freeman be putting down this ten per cent. here for? And the figures below that—three thousand dollars? Somebody wanted a loan of thirty thousand dollars for ninety days—some merchant, probably, and more than likely some Auburn man."

"I'm a little out of my depth, I guess," apologized the chief. "But where do you get the ninety days, Danny?"

"Get it? Get it?" screamed the youth. "Why, here's the three thousand dollars divided by four—the interest on thirty thousand dollars for a year at ten per cent. is three thousand dollars. Three months, or ninety days, is a fourth of a year. Freeman simply divided the three thousand by four—and the seven hundred and fifty has a dollar-mark before it as big as a horse! And underneath that is seventy-five dollars."

"Which means——"

"That I am at least justified in imagining a conference between three men in this room, one Freeman, the others a borrower and a lender. And the loan had been agreed on, practically. The security was satisfactory, for Freeman had already figured the amount of the interest."

"Go on, Danny; I'm dumb."

The elder man's face flushed, the cigar died out and the ashes fell unheeded on his vest.

"I said it was a merchant, dad, because real-estate loans are hardly ever made for less than a year. A merchant would need money for Fall buying. Business has been slow—the Summer has been cold. Whoever wanted this money probably already had a pretty fair line of loans at the banks, yet he needed ready money to buy his Fall goods. If he asked the bank for more, he might get in bad with them. There are just four mercantile houses in this town who might have needed thirty thousand for ninety days."

Dan snatched open the paper again, this time pointing to the display advertisements.

"HERE'S Purnell, Mitchell & Gilmore's — see it — a sacrifice - sale. Look at the prices—they show it's a real sale, not a bluff. 'Collars fifteen cents, marked to eight.' But they're selling only Summer stuff, and selling it pretty close. But leave them out. Mitchell is vice-president of the First National, which has the biggest line of deposits in town, and they're good for any amount at any time for that reason. Leave out Frisbee & Watterson for the same reason. Mrs. Frisbee has a barrel of money herself. Both of them are conservative. But for the cold Summer, they wouldn't have a sale on. They buy too carefully.

"Here's the Emporium, which is a stock-company. If they had to have money, their own people would put it up. Savage, their manager, wouldn't be able to sign for them for so much without the authority of a directors' meeting, and he's been out of town a week, besides. Now, we've only got David Moses of the Bonton store left,

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and he's the only really likely one to need money quick—for he runs his business mostly on jaw-bone and quick turnovers. Six years ago he was carrying a pack from town to town."

Kenefick, senior, was leaning forward now, his face eager—as eager as a hound's which has been circling around until he has at last struck a scent leading away from the crime.

"Is Moses the murderer?" he queried.

"N-a-w!" Dan drawled the word with a peevish snarl. "Freeman was helping Moses—if it was Moses. Moses is timid, though not in business. Why would he kill the man who was helping him? There were three of them—Freeman, Moses and the lender!"

He paused, frowned, crumpled the edge of the newspaper nervously, and studied it for a moment in silence. Only the rustle and the heavy breathing of the chief were audible.

Dan raised his eyes, projecting his spatulate finger as steady as the needle of a theodolite, pointing at the telephone.

"If I'm right, Moses is out of town. If he knew he was going to get this money, he's started for New York by now—leaving the sacrifice-sale to pay expenses and reduce his loans. He wouldn't have waited to get the money before starting—he don't need it until the goods begin to arrive. 'Phone the store and find out where Moses is—right now!"

Dan dropped to his knees as his father reached for the telephone, studying the depression of the wound in the dead man's skull. He viewed it at all angles, and when the 'phone-receiver clicked back on the hook, he was standing by the middle chair, which stood with its back to the door on the long side of the table, and swinging his left arm back and forth with an imaginary something clutched in his left fist.

"I'll have to hand it to you on one thing," reluctantly admitted Kenefick, senior, as he sat heavily down in the end chair farthest from the corpse. His lips were grimly compressed into a thin line. "Moses left for New York on the seven-thirty train last night."

"That's a test of the first link in our chain—and this chain's going to hold," muttered his son. "But we've got to move fast, now."

"Why?"

"BECAUSE," went on the youth who had taken command of Auburn's police force, "when a man commits a crime, even if no one sees him, still every trace of it is really as plain as if the earth was made of glass and everybody was watching him do it. The murderer realizes it and, when the first numbing shock wears off, and he comes out of the daze, he begins to figure on getting away. I'll bet you anything you like our man is planning to beat it, right now!"

"What makes you think that, Danny?"

By degrees the impression was growing in the elder man's mind that his son was right. The youngster wasn't guessing. His projection of his mind from the world of hard reality into the realm of imagination was bearing surprising fruit. Every theory he advanced had behind it a reason. But that reason was never apparent to the chief until it had been given in detail.

"This wasn't a premeditated crime," explained the youthful detective. "The lender, whom I will show you killed Freeman, had no more thought of killing him when he came here than Freeman had of dying. Later, I'll show why.

"But he knows the man's dead. He knows that Moses knows that he was here with Freeman and Moses. And now that the first terror is passing, and a more acute fear is taking its place, he also knows that every moment of delay from now on increases his peril. That's why the murderer is going to try to beat it. Moses took the train to New York. He probably said he would when he left the other two. That's the only reason Moses hasn't been to police headquarters before this to tell what he knows of that meeting.

"But Moses, although in New York, will be back in a few days—four or five at the most. Chances are he won't hear of the murder, except a two or three line telegraphic brief in the city papers to-night—and not even then unless he happens to hit on it. Moses is buying goods, dining with people who sell them, perhaps taking in a theater to-night as their guest. That's why you can't telegraph his hotel and get a reply from him before the fellow will get away—and that's why we've got to figure out here what he looks like and why he killed this man."

"How long have we got?"

The chief was pulling out his watch.

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"What time does the next train leave town?"

"Eleven-thirty. It's nine now."

"If he is still here—and I think it's likely—we've got two hours and a half to identify him, locate him and land him in jail."

Dan's last words died away huskily, as if he were growing tired. His head fell a little forward as he drooped wearily into the middle chair on the long side of the table. But the fire in his eyes grew brighter as he scanned the corpse and the chair near which it lay at the table's end. A whimsical smile was playing around the corners of his mouth. His father's face was set and strained. What was there to smile at in that ghastly room, redolent of tragedy?

"Dad," dreamily murmured the boy, "those joshing reporters were kidding about giving the suspect the third degree. There's many a true word spoken in jest. I'm ready now to set the stage for the super-third degree—to confront the imaginary murderer with the evidence that will make him confess."

He turned to look at his parent. The older man's mind was growing confused with the swift sequence of the accurate pictures which had been whirling across the screen of his brain-cells. For him it was a terrible moment. What would his precocious son do next? Would he conjure up from the pine floor the flesh and blood entity who had done this murder—or would his quick mind hurtle itself over the borderline between reason and insanity?

Dan caught the anxious look in the chief's eyes. His smile broadened and reassured the sole auditor of his statements.

"Throw away that cigar and get pale, dad," he laughed. "I'm going to make you the crook for a few minutes."

Kenefick, senior, essayed a responsive smile. But it died a-borning. For, opposite him, leaning across the table, wearing his own accusatory leer, was the face of Patrick Kenefick himself—but a transformed face, the face of an enthusiast. It was the face of one lit with the sheer triumph of imagination, behind it the urge of youth and power—a face in which confident mastery, born of knowledge, already half hypnotized his intended victim. The harsh voice rasped out the first words:

"YOU don't know who killed this man, hey? Well, we'll see about that."

The chief saw in his son's face his own features undergo their subtle, swift transition. Now they were coldly stern and malignant.

Kenefick, chief, saw himself as if in a huge mirror, abruptly rise, stride to the door, twist the key in the lock and step back to the table.

"We'll see about that!" he exulted. "When he was rich, Freeman knew you. He knew you lent money when you got an interest-rate double a bank's rate, because he'd borrowed from you himself. That's why Freeman became a note-broker when he'd spent all of his money. He knew you had money and he knew many businessmen who often needed money on short-time notes. He sounded you about a loan of thirty thousand dollars for ninety days. You agreed to lend if the security was satisfactory at ten per cent. per annum. Then he brought you here to meet David Moses, who needed this money to buy his Fall stock. Moses showed you a statement of his business, a statement so good you agreed to let him have the money on those terms for that time. That meant seven hundred and fifty dollars interest. The deal was closed. Moses hurried to New York to buy his Fall line, knowing you would let him have the money. You and Freeman were alone here."

Kenefick, junior, paused to glare into the eyes of the pseudo-criminal. Kenefick, senior, sensing the intense earnestness of his son, but desiring to throw every possible obstacle in his way, flashed his denial tersely.

"I didn't!"

"Aw, you didn't?" sarcastically shot back his son. "Then explain this telegram from Moses in New York, where he admits that you and he called on Freeman yesterday. Explain the fact that the Widow Wilkins heard you and Moses talking with Freeman, right in this very room, between two and four o'clock yesterday afternoon. Deny, if you dare, that you left here after that. Why, she saw you leaving. She even noticed that you wore gray clothes. And—you—left—alone!"

"Some one else might have been with Freeman after I left!"

"If there had been more than three men here all yesterday afternoon there might have been more than three. But there were only three. The widow is sure of that. There were only three—one was you, one was Moses, and third was the man you killed."

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"How do you know I killed him?"

Patrick Kenefick was feeling the tug of the strong chain of evidence his son was weaving about him. He was feeling it gradually, as he tested each link and found that it would not yield. Yet, for the life of him, he was still unable to see how the picture could be made sufficiently clear to recognize the actual murderer. He knew such a thing was impossible.

"I'll tell you. You were sitting in this chair where I am now. Your back was toward the door to the room."

"How do you know I was?"

The chief was determined to fight every step of the way.

"Because you couldn't have hit him over the right eye from the other chair! Moses sat there at your right hand on that end of the table. Freeman sat at the end opposite Moses, on your left hand. Nobody could have hit him but you. You finished the business and Moses hurried away. Then you began to hedge on the commission you were to pay Freeman. You complained that Moses ought to pay him."

"How do you know I hedged on paying the commission?"

"I know it because you're a miser—a grasping, greedy old money-lender, who'd even charge ten per cent. interest on this perfectly good loan because you knew Moses had to have the money and you had him in a hole. Freeman said it was none of your blankety-blank business what Moses did or didn't do. That you had promised him ten per cent. of the interest for getting the loan—seventy-five dollars."

"How do you know it was seventy-five dollars Freeman was to get?"

"Because the last thing Freeman ever wrote in his life was seventy-five dollars in figures—see it here, on the edge of this newspaper right under the ten per cent. interest figures of seven hundred and fifty dollars? He demanded that seventy-five. You kept trying to get him to take less—kept squeezing a cent as a miser always does. You always squeeze a penny tighter than most men do a dollar. Then you quarreled."

"How do you know we quarreled over paying the money—how do you know I refused to pay that commission of seventy-five dollars?"

"I know it because that's the way you have piled up your money. You never let go of a cent. That's why you have money. That's why you had thirty thousand to loan to Moses. You refused to pay the seventy-five dollars after you had agreed to pay it because you couldn't bear to let go of it. But Freeman told you to your miserly old face that he'd make you pay every cent of that seventy-five dollars—told you he'd sue you before he'd take seventy-four dollars and ninety-nine cents—sue you, make you pay and make you pay costs besides."

"Did Freeman tell you that? And if he didn't and if we were alone here, how can you prove it?"

"Did Freeman tell me?" reiterated the youth. "Not before he died. *But he did tell me afterward!* Freeman was a sport, but he was no tinhorn, no crybaby. He was a thoroughbred. He'd see anything through. He cursed you and swore to make you pay that seventy-five dollars."

"How do you know he cursed me?"

"Because he had such a foul mouth that it was the wonder of the town. He had a reputation for that sort of thing. He cursed you, reviled the parents who gave you birth—and then you killed him!"

"What motive did I have for killing him?"

"NONE. You never meant to kill him. You struck him in blind anger when you resented the vile insult he heaped on your birth. But you killed him. And Freeman told me after he died just what he was saying—because you killed him with one blow, and he died before he even knew he was in danger. You froze on his face the same sneer he wore when he cursed you and promised to make you pay that seventy-five dollars. Look into his dead face if you dare and read *there* the answer whether or not he told me that he was cursing you!"

In spite of his many years of police experience, in spite of the play-acting he knew was transpiring, it was all so uncanny that Chief Kenefick could not check his shudder until the youth's quick eye had noted it.

"Getting to you, am I?" he snarled, twisting his face savagely and a little lower. "You struck him dead—struck him just one *left-handed blow*."

The chief bristled up in his chair.

"You can't prove it!" he gibed defiantly.

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"Can't I?"

The undertone of cold menace sent the shivers along the older man's spine again. It was becoming terribly real to him. But his defiance was no less real. He snarled like a beast in replying:

"No you can't. Prove it! What did I hit him with?"

Dan sprang toward the windows opening on the lawn. He threw up the one nearest the hallway, and shot his square-end forefinger through the opening, freighting it with a picture so vivid that out in the calm Autumnal morning the veritable figure of a man began to arise with his next words.

"YOU are not over five feet seven inches high, you have a right leg that's lame and you walked in here yesterday afternoon using a cane. You walked leaning heavily on that cane."

"Rot!" sneered the chief. "You're only bluffing me."

"Then explain that little row of holes nearest the right-hand center of the gravel-walk that your cane made coming in, when you pressed it down in the ground. You walked in, leaning on your cane in your *left* hand!"

"How do you know I didn't carry it in my right hand?"

"Because one row of the cane-holes is on the *inside* of the walk—a little to the right-hand side of the center; and your footprints pointing *toward* the house are on the *right* of those holes, still farther toward the right-hand edge of the walk. That *half* proves you carry your cane in your left hand."

Kenefick, senior, stared stupidly. He had seen those holes, but their significance had not been apparent before.

"Coming in, you walked over on the right side," went on the remorseless voice, "because the gravel-walk slopes each way from the center to the sides. Your right leg is lame—and it is easier to swing it than to bend it. It swings easier where the ground is lower on one side than where the path is level. So you edge over to that side."

"Any man might have walked in on either side or made the same cane-holes around the center, while walking on the left side with a cane in his right hand. You can't get over *that*."

"He might *once*—but not *twice*. The habit of years forced itself on you, even while hurrying away from your crime. You instinctively sought the *other* side of the path coming out—to favor that game leg of yours again. That's the *other half* of the proof that you carry your cane in your left hand!"

"Moonshine!" sneered the older man.

"Then explain how those two rows of cane-holes are *both* toward the center of the walk—two rows—showing where you walked in and out. Explain why the occasional footprints—coming in or going out—are *always* on the *right* of each row of holes. If you had been a man carrying a cane in your *right* hand, those cane-holes would have been wide apart and toward each edge of that gravel-walk, instead of close together and toward the center. Besides, you can't deny that the cane was carried, not only by a left-handed man, but by a man of your own height, not over five feet seven inches tall."

"Did you see the man?" bellowed the chief.

"Of course not," admitted the enthusiast. "But I know he was not over five feet seven inches tall, as well as if I'd seen him."

"Aw! You know, do you? How do you know he wasn't six feet two inches tall?"

"He wasn't, because he was you. If it wasn't you, then explain why each of those holes is not more than two feet seven inches apart—showing you stepped that far when you walked in—and explain how a man that steps two feet seven inches at a step can be more than five feet seven inches tall?"

"There's hundreds of people carry canes in this town."

"Not this kind of a cane!" flashed back the inquisitor proudly. "Not a heavy ash or hickory cane, bent at the upper end. Not a cane that you use because you have to use it to help a game leg—a cane that presses deep in a hard gravel-walk, as this one did, when you walked up the right-hand side of that gravel-walk, taking advantage of the slope to swing your game leg along the outer lower edge, instead of lifting it, because it's easier to swing it than to lift it."

"How do you know I'm lame?"

"I know from the depth of the holes the cane made on that hard gravel. If you'd been *swinging* the cane, instead of *leaning heavily* on it, there wouldn't have been those holes—deep holes, always on the left

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of the way your feet point—holes showing you leaning your weight at every step on a cane-handle bent at right angles, and terminating in a nickel or German-silver metal end—*an end which is cased in and which slants on the under side to a point!*"

Dan leaned back toward his father, his tense face lit with the apotheosis of his incipient victory. He seized the older man's left hand in a grasp so abrupt and strong that he wrested from it the long, hexagonal pencil with which the chief had been nervously tapping the table.

"I've told you the story the walk tells," he hissed. "Every step you took shows you used your cane, carrying it in your left hand. Now, see why I know *how* you killed this man lying here."

He swiftly bent over the grimly smiling, inert figure on the floor, fitting the point of the pencil into the depression.

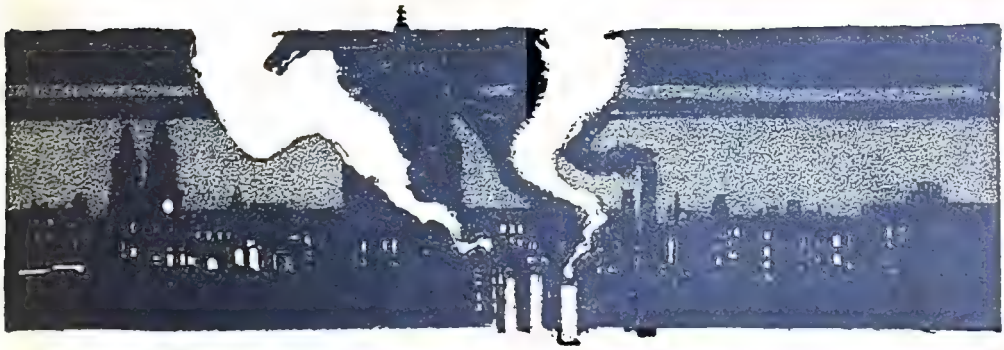
"Do you see that? You struck William Channing Freeman a left-handed blow which killed him and you hit him over the right eye, swinging, naturally, with the left hand in which you always carry your cane, because he was there, at your left-hand side. That's why there was no weapon here when the police arrived. You used the cane to walk away with—you didn't dare leave it here. The metal end of that cane shattered his skull like an egg-shell. And this triangular hole fits the triangular end of your cane so accurately that there isn't a single jury in the whole world that won't convict you of the crime—*when they see what you see now!*"

"I know the guy!" roared Chief Patrick Kenefick, and with that roar the curtain fell on the super-third degree.

III

THE telephone-bell was ringing. Young Kenefick leaped from the chair where he had been sitting studying the face of the dead man and clapped the ear-piece to his head.

"What's that, dad? Got him? Only man in town that fitted the picture? Fine, chief! Jumping Jupiter—old Roscoe Ellsworth! His right leg's a wooden one? Don't that beat all! Had his grip packed? And he's confessed? No, you can't make it murder—only manslaughter. Not more than ten years at the outside. Say, dad, do you remember Freeman's face? You said he was laughing at you—and him dead. The grin was 'on you' you said. Well, I wish you could see him right now—his grin's an inch wider than it was at eight o'clock this morning. Hold on a minute, dad. You know that I—I—— Well, you understand I didn't mean to be too hard on you when I was making you loop the loop over here, don't you?"



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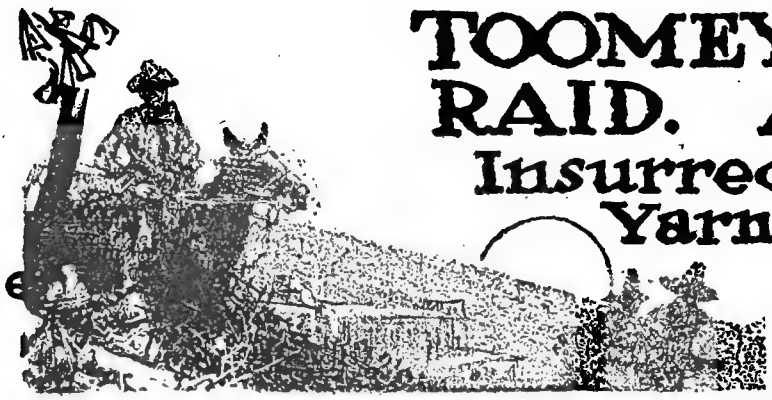

TOOMEY'S RAID. An Insurrecto Yarn

By Isham Burke

TOOMEY is only a private of cavalry, and a poor soldier at that, if his non-commissioned officers are good judges. But he is the idol of the Mexicans all through southern Arizona. They call him El Capitan and vie with one another to do him kindness. Every laborer and vaquero is his loyal friend. Little boys fight for the honor of grooming his horse and scouring his equipments. He never has to buy a meal or pay for a drink between Nogales and Douglas. His adoring retinue is the wonder of his comrades, and the reason of it remains the unsolved riddle of local military circles. Toomey himself does not quite understand what it is all about. But he does know that the glory of El Capitan Tume dates from a certain adventurous day off.

Toomey was only a newly made soldier then, a youngster who looked like a farm-laborer despite his uniform. He took his duties and responsibilities lightly, considered the first sergeant a mean, tyrannical old medler, thought the two lieutenants conceited dudes, and was gloriously independent under his frequent punishments. And when he decided to ride into Sonora and take a look around among the ranches, he had no misgivings whatever, though he knew that there was some kind of civil war going on across the border. Once out of reach of the provost guard, what had he to fear? Who would dare molest him, since he would be mounted and in uniform and armed with his pistol?

SO HE started, early one morning, ostensibly for Nogales. (His company was tenting near Harrison's Ranch, where the Santa Cruz flows down from Mexico.) But when Private Murphy, on guard near the obelisk, had passed up the line of fence, Toomey let himself through the two gates, piously closing them after him, as all farm-bred men do by instinct, and walked his horse down the dusty trail through the mesquite. He was free for the day.

A breathless boy brought the news to Rancho Terrenos. A gringo soldier was riding down the road—a real gringo soldier in yellow khaki breeches and bleached gaiter-leggings and flannel shirt, with his hat turned up sharply in front and rear. Having headed him off several times and watched from ambush, the boy knew every detail of his dress. Also, the gringo had a face like carved redwood, wore no beard, after the strange fashion of his people, and had hair almost as fair as flax. He sat in the middle of his saddle and whistled most beautifully through his teeth and did not spur his horse, though it was going very slowly. Beyond doubt, this must be a very strange and very brave man!

All the dozens of little boys who had left off their leisurely sports to hear of this wonder now ran up the road to have a peep at the stranger. The women, exclaiming shrilly, set themselves to making a cool *horchata*, thick and creamy and well-spiced. The men consulted together under the porch that ran the full length of the long, mud-colored ranch-house.

The stranger could be no other than a deserter, else he would not have crossed the border; being a deserter, he would be in search of a rebel force, for the Federals enrolled few foreigners. Then his coming was providential, for even now there were ten recruits at the ranch, awaiting information

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of the whereabouts of the revolutionists. They were Mexican laborers from the nearer ranches in Arizona, armed with old Winchesters, an untried and timorous party, and the gringo would be a pillar of strength to them. Surely he was a very valiant man. He would lead them south. Already were these recruits lightened of their cares; already they leaned with placid confidence on their unseen and unknown leader.

He came at last, an erect, confident figure on a great bay horse, the very pink of soldiers, with his juvenile guard of honor following at a safe distance. Enthusiasm mounted with his nearness. The women crowded to the doors and exclaimed and commented and admired.

CARANTES, the foreman, himself came forward to hold the stranger's horse—a great honor, for Carantes was, in the absence of Don Pio, the absolute ruler of the ranch. And Carantes's appearance bespoke his dignity, for his gray sombrero was heavy with silver, his tight jacket and pantaloons were of deerskin, salmon-colored, his boots tall and ornate, his pistol-grips of carved ivory.

His speech of welcome would have done credit to Don Pio himself, and Toomey, reflecting that the man was a poor, ignorant foreigner and might never have had the chance to learn English, answered him very politely, saying that it was a nice day and hoping that all the folks were well. The intent of both speeches was apparent, even though the words were meaningless, and every one was pleased.

Then the parlor was opened—a rare thing and therefore very impressive. Carantes, out of an excess of politeness, sat very stiffly on the extreme edge of his chair and the two gravely pledged one another in *horchatas*. The recruits stood awkwardly against the wall and the doorway buzzed with womenfolk, all delighted at the apparent relish with which the foreigner drank.

Carantes pointed to the ten hopefuls and explained their wishes and intentions—in Spanish, of course—and illustrated his meaning, as well as he could, with expressive gestures.

"They are soldiers of Madero." The name meant nothing to Toomey and he would never have guessed them to be soldiers. "They go to the south—" he pointed —"with your Grace. There they will fight —yes, Señor—and kill many 'Palomas.'" He went through the motions of aiming and pulling the trigger, then clutched his breast and gasped and threw himself suddenly forward, as though he were about to fall out of his chair.

Toomey was much mystified, but he smiled and nodded and said, "Yes, that's all right, old man," and Carantes swept a complacent eye over his audience and twisted his mustaches and thought himself a very clever man, to have been able to make his meaning clear to a gringo.

Toomey, at the instigation of Carantes, shook hands with the ten untried and they all filed out again. The very air was electric with the war-spirit, and two of the vaqueros, one old and gray, one quite young, seeing a chance to start their military career under fair auspices, called for their blankets and saddle-canteens and fell in with the patriots. A woman brought Toomey a blanket —a very gay affair of red and black checks —and a servant tied it behind the saddle. Then Carantes dug up twenty great Mexican dollars from the recesses of his belt and clothing, piled them neatly on his palm and offered them with obvious sorrow that they were so few.

Toomey was quite overcome by what he considered to be merely Latin hospitality —but he accepted the blanket and the dollars. And when Carantes saw fit to repeat the pantomime of shooting and dying, a great light broke on Toomey. He looked around at the twelve men all ready to accompany him, and knew that they were an escort, sent with him to see that he came to no harm in the troubled state of the country. Deeply moved by this kindness heaped upon the visiting alien, he thanked Carantes and the men with much feeling, laying his hand, somewhat bashfully, upon his heart. Cheers from the men and fervent blessings from the women greeted this concession to sentiment.

At last they were off with a clamorous shouting of farewells, the house was lost in a turn of the road and they entered the big mesquite. They wound along in a smudge of dust, the cowboys riding wide on either hand, the footmen crowding close and occasionally touching the horse of their leader, as though to verify their good fortune.

Soon there was a halt and much excited

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talk, and they were off again at a faster pace. Then at a word from the older of the vaqueros, who had taken upon himself the office of lieutenant, the footmen dived into the mesquite on either hand and left the three riding alone.

TOOMEY was curious, but before he could devise a way of questioning his companions he was violently enlightened. The gray-green growth thinned and ceased, the path suddenly mounted an embankment and the railroad stretched to right and left—a single track, unfenced, following the valley of the Santa Cruz. As they reached the crest, little gray figures sprang into life along the line. There was a frantic tapping on the rails that passed away, from man to man, into the distance, then the crack of a rifle and the windy passing of a bullet over Toomey's head. He reined up, worrying his pistol from its buttoned holster and raising it to the ready, but there was no need for action. His assailant had already fled.

Things happened with bewildering rapidity. There was an irregular outbreak of firing from the brush—the ten laborers going into action—and both his horsemen drove their spurs home and charged furiously down the track, at great risk to their ponies' legs and their own necks. The old one bent low in the saddle, raced with a loose rein to the nearest trestle, a long hundred yards distant, hurled himself to the ground with seeming indifference to broken bones and disappeared beneath the structure. The younger, a downy-bearded youth, swung his rope neatly over the fleeing rifleman, jerked him off his feet and dragged him, screaming and cursing, back through the deep dust of the right of way. Then they were all gathered together, as if by a trick of conjuring and trotting on their way again, their prisoner, covered with dust and sweat, having joined them, rifle and all. Behind them a crackling blaze crept along the wooden bridge.

At the first irrigation-ditch there was a halt for rest and drinking. The men soused their heads in the tepid water, kicked the grit from their sandals and smoked, sitting upon their thong-bound blanket-rolls. Meanwhile Toomey tried to readjust his ideas concerning them. Plainly this was not a mere escort of ranch-hands, but an aggressively militant body, a band of partisans. He looked at them with new respect; they had shown their ability by cutting the line of a guarded railway.

As they proceeded the men told each other how fortunate they were in their leader. They reminded one another of his cool and unruffled bearing in the thick of the fight, as he sat in his very exposed position on the top of the embankment. And some patted him on the leg and called him their dear Captain; even their late enemy and new recruit, the Federal guard, seemed to take pride in his dashing officer. To be sure, Toomey had given no active help, but his presence had inspired their late heroism, and they required no more of him.

Although in Toomey's philosophy foreigners were necessarily queer, all this attention and affection should have a reason.

"They must think I'm some kind of a mascot," he concluded, and let it go at that.

They traveled on slowly for several hours, passing between fields of ripening barley, crossing and recrossing the almost dry bed of the Santa Cruz, resting often under great white sycamores. Sometimes they met barelegged laborers splashing in the irrigation-ditches, repairing weak places with plodding apathy. Once, as they caught sight of the railroad across the fields, they were greeted with shots, but the bullets passed far over their heads.

"Raised sights make the rifle shoot harder," says the Mexican Volunteer, and sets the military sights at the topmost notch; hence many bloodless skirmishes.

A little after noon they approached another ranch-house—a great gabled building with a tile roof and many balconies and a high-walled court and garden shaded by sycamores. At the first sight of it the army halted to take council. There followed considerable argument and many references to "Don Antón" and "Palomas," as the Federals were commonly called, and one pointed out a gray figure that passed and repassed just inside the open gate of the walled space. In the end they appealed to their Captain for orders, pointing to him questioningly and then to the building, some three hundred yards distant, then describing a path around the ranch and into the hills.

"Here's where I've got to leave them," said Toomey to himself. "They're goin' around, but the ranch for mine; that's what they mean."

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Nodding vigorously to show that he caught their idea, he shook hands with them all around, not forgetting the changeling Federal, thanked them as well as he could for the protection of their company, picked up his reins and moved from the mesquite into the open road.

It seems that signs do not always tell the truth. Toomey thought he was saying, "Thank you, old boys, and good-by. I'm off to that ranch for dinner; sorry you can't come along."

But what his hearers gathered was, "There is our enemy; let us charge them! Death or glory! And I will bid you all farewell, my brave men, for some of us may die in the assault."

CONSEQUENTLY, as he started, they all broke cover in a body, the two cowboys spurred their ponies, the well-trained cavalry-horse took up the pace and the three pelted across the open with the footmen laboring behind.

The sentry paused in the doorway and stood for several precious seconds, paralyzed with astonishment. Then he fired into the air to give the alarm, threw away his rifle and tried to close the gates, but they were propped with sharpened stakes and, before he could more than kick these aside, the wild riders were upon him.

Toomey was in the center and the gate yawned wide before him. The others, fearing that the passage was too narrow for all, dragged their mounts to a sliding stand at the very sill. Neither Toomey nor the troop-horse being accustomed to such sudden stops, they shot through the opening and half-way across the yard with little diminished speed.

Then a hemp hammock caught the big bay across the breast and brought him up with a shock that made the two supporting saplings bend and whip the air. The rider left the saddle, with a final unwilling jerk at the stirrups, landed heavily on the hard-beaten turf, and so missed seeing the bloodless capture of the stronghold with its entire garrison of eight volunteers.

His next impression was of the interior of the ranch-office. His head still rang and his vision was none too clear, but some one fed him with burning, maddening mescal, and, in self-defense, he came to life.

His very able second in command knelt before an open safe, filling his sombrero with coin and currency, while his followers watched with rapt fixity. The Federal volunteers, still armed and now quite friendly, exhibited little less interest, and the unhappy rancher was far from indifferent.

He was a plump little man, fair and Spanish-featured, dressed all in black—a braided bolero jacket, tight-fitting vest buttoned up close to the neck, tight pantaloons fastened down the side from sash to ankle with many little buttons. Though he was very evidently angry, his fright so far exceeded his anger that he made no protest, but fidgeted about under the lax guard of the younger vaquero, cursing under his breath and wringing his little mustache with an uncertain and anxious persistence. Toomey found himself laughing at the little Don—and Toomey was not naturally hard-hearted. It was the mescal, which is bad for the disposition.

The old cowboy dumped his treasure on the floor before the Captain and commenced a laborious distribution. The odd bank-notes, about a fifth of the total, made up Toomey's portion, but he was too giddy to care and scarcely realized when a clumsy hand buttoned the roll of bills into the pocket of his shirt.

The few pieces of gold went to the distributor himself, who swept them up with his left hand and laid his right on his pistol, challenging opposition with fierce, alert eyes.

There was a murmur—scarcely more than a sigh of regret—and when the glittering stuff was out of sight in the owner's sash the tension was past and peace secure.

Then 'dobe dollars were dealt like cards, then halves, then, after some conversation that reeked of the fumes of captured mescal, the small change was turned over to the grateful garrison.

And the owner, forced to witness this division of his cash-on-hand, gloomed and glared, sighed and groaned, and breathed fervent curses as loudly as he dared.

The afternoon and evening went in feasting and revelry, in which the rival forces mingled with perfect good feeling, and the servants outdid themselves in lavishing the dainties which should have been reserved for the master and his guests of quality. There was drink in abundance and the voices grew louder with boasting and much singing, and, at last, came a dance by two of the men who were still fairly steady.

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Toomey sat in happy fuddlement and watched them—a laborer, cheaply clad and oddly overarmed with two of the Don's handsome pistols, and his companion in the dance, the sergeant in charge of the Federals, a dirty gray figure wreathed with bandoliers and shod, like the rest, with rawhide sandals. They moved through the figures with grave faces and swaying grace, every step timed to the rattling of castanets—the heart-beats of the dance. Somewhere, some one was playing on a guitar, and there was sound of low singing—the speaking voice of the same passion.

Innumerable candles lined the walls, held in crooked wrought spikes that were thrust between the bricks. There were too many candles; to Toomey's eyes, the place glared like a furnace, and the dancers seemed to recede with their music into far distance and again draw near. And he was very warm. He leaned weakly forward over the table, his hand wandering aimlessly among the cluttered dishes in search of a cool wine-bottle.

The dance became wilder, the step faster, and a familiar sound came to the soldier's ears—the clink of a blade in a scabbard. It was the bayonet of the Federal, that beat against his thigh with every bounding step, but to Toomey it recalled something else—the sabers of his two officers, the two lieutenants that were the aids and abettors of the busy top-sergeant, and the full horror of his situation was driven home to him.

Here he was, at least twelve miles from the border, cut off by hostile railroad-guards, a stranger to the roads, perhaps a little the worse for liquor—and he must be back by roll-call or face untold hours of stable-orderly or kitchen-orderly or some such punishment!

He got to his feet, not without an effort, and addressed the company. The dancers suddenly halted; all hushed one another and paid eager attention.

"I'VE gotta go——" He pointed in the direction that he dimly remembered to be north, and patted himself on the chest. The pocketful of bills crinkled under his hand. "I've gotta be there to-morrow—to-morrow——"

With inspired instinct he pointed to the east and described the rising of the sun with an upward movement of his arm—"in the United States, or I'll get stuck——"

He groped vaguely for some way to express punishment, then held out his hands as though they were manacled.

"I don't want any of that for mine; no sir!"

He shook his head and questioned his listeners with a look.

There was a short silence, then the old vaquero assumed the part of interpreter.

"This is surely what the Captain says to us: that we go, with this our money, to the United States, quickly, before the morrow, for there we will not be arrested."

A chorus of pleased nods and oaths confirmed the old man's wild guesses.

"Yes, by the Mother, that is the thought of the Captain!"

"And it is wise!"

"We will be safe there."

"Yes, one who crosses the line in war is safe."

"The very brave man!"

"The wise Captain!"

"And with our money——"

The lieutenant again gained a hearing.

"We have done enough for liberty; we have destroyed a bridge and driven away its guards; we have taken a strong ranch and set free these eight who were forced to serve the oppressor——"

"Yes, yes," came the affirmation of the Federal sergeant, "it is true; we will now go with your Graces, thanks to the Virgin and your Graces."

"We have justly taken his blood-stained money from the Don Antón, who has always stood with the *cientîficos* devils——"

"Yes, may his soul burn!" assented the sergeant.

"Then let us take the best horses and saddles of the Don Antón, and whatever else we need. To change a brand—how easy! And the officers of revenue are few and those few, fools. We will go like princes!"

And so they did, the twenty-one, with their leader, all well mounted and loaded with plunder and happily warm with food and drink. At the burned bridge they encountered the repair-gang, guarded by an armored car. Fires lighted the workmen and showed them dragging timbers about, with much useless shouting. The light gleamed on the resting locomotive, the beam-laden flat-cars, the steel-sheathed box car with its sides painted in great checks to obscure the loopholes. A fusillade of pistol-shots sent the workmen scurrying

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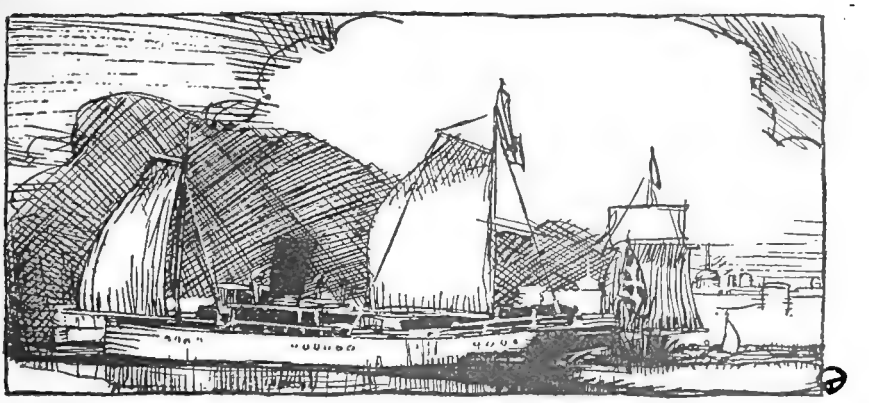
into the darkness and set the guards fumbling about their machine-gun. But sleepy gunners in the dark do not work to much purpose, and the riders swept over the crossing and were safe in the mesquite before the first shot was fired.

For a few minutes the pulse of the little gun beat fiercely as it attacked the darkness. But at the first turn of the valley the vicious drumming was suddenly dulled. Soon the wind in the brush and the thud of the hoofs smothered the distant sounds of battle.

Some time in the night they passed the border by a rugged path—a smugglers' road—that wound up and down through confusing little valleys and over yucca-studded wastes of gravel-hills. And in the chill of early dawn, within sight of the light in the guard-tent, Toomey bade his blanket-swathed companions a warm farewell and rode up to be challenged.

Such was Private Toomey's adventurous and profitable outing. And yet, though all the Mexicans of the countryside know the details of that glorious campaign, Toomey himself, the fortunate spectator, has never made out why they call him "the Captain."



MRS. FRASER

By W. Townend

"A R'VE met him once or twice, thut's a'," said the chief engineer of the *Umballa*. "But—ye've got ta be shipmates wi' a mon before ye can say ye know him."

"You can say that after one voyage," said Mr. Harrington thoughtfully, "but when you've been with a man a couple of years steady you'll be more than apt to think you don't know him at all."

He paused and drummed with his fingers on the mess-room table.

"Ever run across the *Narcissus?*" he asked.

"No," I said, "I've not."

The chief pondered. "Tha *Narcissus!* Noo, let me think. Aye, Ar mind seein' tha *Narcissus* in Karachi—no, Bombay; six, seven year' back."

"I'd left her then," said Mr. Harrington quickly.

"Lost in tha Mediterranean year ago last January, if Ar'm no mistaken. A' hands were saved though. They said there were a tidy pile o' money made over thut."

Mr. Harrington snapped his fingers.

"*They!* Of course they would. That's just what they *would* say. But they're wrong. Dad Rankin would have murdered his father an' mother sooner than lost his ship on purpose, insurance or no insurance. But that's neither here nor there. Your talkin' about knowin' a man if you were shipmates with him makes me think of a

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man I once sailed with. Fraser was his name. He was mate of the *Narcissus* when I was second engineer."

"Short, thick-set chup wi' red hair un' a temper like a fiend?"

Mr. Harrington shook his head.

"No. You mean Ginger Fraser. I've met him, too. He's a captain now somewhere or other. This one was Jack; diff'rent every partic'ler from Ginger. The best man that ever walked, was Jack. Bar none. Ought I to say present company excepted? That's taken for granted.

"BUT Jack Fraser—well, he was Jack Fraser; kind-hearted an' good-natured,with a smile and a pleasant word for every one. I tell you, I never saw him lose his temper but once, an' that at Port Said with a Greek who was beatin' a poor, half dead skeleton of a horse. An' Jack pretty near killed him.

"Yes, Jack was most amazing popular, even with the deck-hands. Not that he was easy. He wasn't. Far from it. He wanted the work done an' done right, an' he wouldn't take any excuses.

"For more than a year, fourteen months in all, Jack Fraser and I were together on the *Narcissus*, and if I'd been asked straight, I'd ha' said that I knew him through an' through, from beginnin' to end. Yet—when it was all over I found how little I did know. We might have been strangers instead of friends. There wasn't a thing he owned that wasn't mine for the asking. He'd have given me his last penny, an' then when it was all over, it might have been some one else—a stranger.

"You don't understand, do you? No more did I. I don't now, really. But listen! Nothin' that I learned afterward made me forget what Jack Fraser had been to me. He may have done things he shouldn't have done, but what of that? Was I to judge him on that account, an' without hearing his side? Not much.

"Mind this! Jack never made any pretense of bein' a saint. He was just a sinner, same as any other sinner, not afraid to speak to a girl or take a drink. He wasn't a hypocrite. What he did, he did openly. He was popular—I said that, didn't I?—popular aboard ship and on shore, too. I never saw the man or the woman who wouldn't be friends with Jack Fraser if he wanted 'em to. He'd smile once, an' that'd be sufficient.

"Funny, but if he hadn't said *not*, you'd ha' thought his one ambition was to go knockin' around the world in tramp steamers for ever an' ever. He was always so everlasting cheerful. Was it put on? What was he like when he was by himself in his own room? But—*like* the sea! —— no! No better than the rest of us do. As soon as we left port homeward-bound, Jack'd begin to talk: what he'd do when we reached England; the lights of London; the first drink ashore and so on. It used to make me smile to listen to him. Lord knows being homeward-bound meant no more to me than if we were headin' for Hamburg or Philadelphia!

"Many's the night I've come on deck for a breath o' fresh air when my watch was over an' seen Jack leanin' over the side of the bridge whistlin'. And always the same old tune. That rotten 'Rolling Home'! —— of a tune that!

"I remember reachin' Gib one voyage just as a man-o'-war was leavin'. They were homeward-bound, an' they steamed past us with the band playin' 'Rolling Home.'

" 'Hang them!' says Jack, an' he doesn't speak to a soul till evenin'.

"I thought it funny at the time, 'cause we were homeward-bound ourselves an' had put into Gib for bunkers. Later on I understood.

"An' then came the last voyage we made together, from Bombay to London, with a general cargo. It might have been the same as any other voyage but for the way it ended. Nothing happened till we'd passed the Straits, but the last few days made up for all that had gone before.

"Queer, isn't it, how you'll be with a man day after day without noticing anything wrong and all at once there he is, down with something that you ought to have seen weeks ago! Why didn't we see that Jack Fraser was sick? We didn't, any of us, an' there he was right under our eyes, dyin' by inches. It was the old man noticed it first. An' then we heard that Jack Fraser wasn't very well. God help us! Not very well!

"I HADN'T come across him for the best part of a week, an' when I saw his white face an' the hollers in his cheeks an' the dark rings under his eyes I was scared.

" 'You needn't look like that!' says he

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with a laugh. 'I'll be all right by the time we reach home.' 'But what is it?' I says. 'Nothin' much,' he says. 'Pain in my side, that's all!'

"He was sick; yes. Mortal sick. But give up? Not he! He did his work till he couldn't do it any longer. Then he collapsed one night on the bridge an' had to be taken down to his room. I was in the engine-room when the chief told me, and I went up to see him at eight bells.

" 'They're makin' all this fuss about nothin',' says Jack. 'I'll be out of my bunk by to-morrer.'

"But he wasn't out of his bunk again ever. He got weaker an' weaker. Couldn't sleep or eat. Just lay on his back, miserable because his being sick meant more work for the others. An' brave! As brave as they make 'em.

"I used to sit with him whenever I could spare the time an' listen to him talkin', under his breath almost, about how glad he'd be to be home again.

" 'When'll we be in?' says he one night.

" 'To-morrer afternoon,' says I.

" 'Thought so,' says he. 'You can smell the green grass already. I'm better I think.'

"An' he lay very still, with his eyes closed, so I tiptoed out.

"It seemed as if I hadn't been asleep ten minutes before some one was tryin' to wake me up.

" 'One bell?' says I, thinkin' it was the third engineer. But it was a deck-hand shakin' me.

" 'No,' says he, 'it's just gone four bells,' he says, 'an' the Captain asked if you'd have a look at Mr. Fraser.'

"I jumped out of my bunk as wide awake as ever I'd been in my life.

" 'Is he worse?' says I.

" 'Yes,' says the sailor, 'he's dyin'.'

"An' as I ran along the deck the old man tells me that Jack's sinkin', an' will I sit with him as *he* can't leave the bridge.

"I'll never forget that night; Jack lyin' in his bunk breathin' unsteady, an' the lamp burnin' low, an' now and again footsteps on the deck an' the ship's bell soundin' the half-hours an' the clock tickin'. By an' by Jack opens his eyes an' begins to speak in a whisper. I tried to catch what he said an' only heard the tick-tock of the clock till it drove me half crazy an' I took it out into the cabin.

"For a long time he didn't say anything, just stared at the ceiling, an' then he reaches out his hand an' takes hold of mine.

" 'Ethel,' he says very distinctly, 'you mustn't fret, dear. It won't be for long. Only a few months and I'll be home again.'

"It gave me the horrors to hear him talkin' to some one I couldn't see an' yet lookin' straight at me an' holdin' my hand. He never let go, not even when he dropped off to sleep, not even when he opened his eyes again.

" 'Hullo, Harrington!' says he, with a little of his old smile. And I knew that the end was near.

" 'I thought I could hold out till I reached home,' he says. 'But,' says he, 'I was wrong. I couldn't. I'm sorry,' he says. 'There were so many things I wanted to do.' After a while: 'I've made a mess of my life all through. But it's too late now,' he says.

"He lay very still, claspin' my hand tight, and I didn't move.

" 'Have we passed the Goodwins yet?' says he presently. 'I'd ha' liked to have seen the white cliffs an' the South Foreland again.' An' then, little while later, he whispers, 'Harrington, when I'm buried I'd like to have the Union Jack over me, not the red ensign.'

"Queer that, wasn't it?

"An' then from the bridge above us comes the *clang-clang* of the bell.

" 'Listen!' says Jack. He gives a little sigh. 'Eight bells, eh!' says he. 'Eight bells! An' the watch is over.' He lets go my hand. 'I'm tired,' says he; 'awfully tired.'

"He closes his eyes an' rolls over on his side. I fancied he'd fallen asleep till I looked close. Then I saw that he'd gone.

"The old man came in.

" 'How is he?' he says. I shook me head an' went down to the engine-room to take the morning-watch.

"I learnt afterward what had killed him, but—I dunno', it's not for the likes of me to blame. Nor no one. He never complained, an' he must have suffered agonies for months. Even when he knew that he'd have to go he was still happy an' cheerful an' smilin'. An' that made what came after all the more incomprehensible.

"Now, Jack Fraser an' I were friends. I knew him as well as one man can know another, an' yet—when the old man asked me about his people an' his home, what

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could I tell him? Only this. His mother an' father were dead, an' that was all. I'd never even learned where he went to when he was clear of the ship. But is that extraordinary? I don't think so. You know a chap, but you don't go askin' him questions about his people or his home, do you?"

The chief engineer shook his head. "Thut's so. Ar couldna tell ye aboot yours ta begin with."

MR. HARRINGTON rested his elbows on the table.

"Jack had had friends in London, but how was that goin' to help? London's a big place. A —— of a big place. I'd a letter once from London, an' if I could have found out whereabouts it come—but that's got nothin' to do with Jack Fraser, anyway.

"We had to send the news of his death to some one, of course. An' so, 'Go through his papers,' says the old man.

"Ever searched through a dead man's belongings: books, papers, clothes? No? Well, you're lucky! It hurt. Dunno why. It's funny what a lot of rubbish a chap gathers at sea! There'll be something he values an' keeps voyage after voyage, an' then—he dies. An' the next feller says, 'What the blazes did he keep this for?' an' throws it away.

"Most fellers have some addresses written down in note-books or somewhere, haven't they? But with Jack Fraser, there wasn't a thing that would help. That is, I thought there wasn't. I'd hunted everywhere an' given up hope when I came upon a bundle of letters that he had tucked away in a collar-box.

" 'Dearest Jack,' each one of 'em. Signed 'Ethel. Your sweetheart, Ethel.' The address—ever noticed how a girl heads a letter? These had Denmark Hill, S. E., nothin' more. All except one, which had the name of the road an' the number of the house.

"But no name except Ethel.

"An' the letters! Poor Jack! It wasn't right for any one else to read those letters, only him. Yet I had to. Oh, yes! The old story. What does a girl write to a man when he's all the world to her? An' he—— From the way she wrote, Jack must have been as bad. They were goin' to get married soon.

II

"I'VE tackled some queer jobs since I've been at sea, but never one like the chief and I had on our hands that day. The old man refused flat. So did the second mate. So the chief and I set off together from the docks, 'way across London to Denmark Hill. Ever been there? An' what had the chief and I to do? Nothin' much, except go to a certain house in a certain road, ask for a girl called Ethel an' no other name known, an' then say that he—her man—was dead.

"I dunno—the whole thing seemed impossible: us, fresh from a voyage to Bombay an' back, driftin' around a London suburb on that errand! An' all the time I was wonderin' how I could have known Jack so well an' yet not heard about the girl he'd been goin' to marry.

"It wasn't a big house or anything grand: just ord'nary; one of a terrace; rather old-fashioned, with a basement an' iron railings. Just like a million others in London. An' we could see into the kitchen, the cook rollin' dough on a board, an' a policeman stared at us as he went by.

"We rang the bell an' waited on the door-steps till the girl who'd been rollin' the dough had had time to wipe the flour off an' open the door. An' then I looked at the chief an' the chief he looked at me.

" 'We've an important message for Miss Ethel,' I says, an' there I stops, an' the housemaid or cook, whatever she was, says 'Won't you come in? Mrs. Thompson an' Miss Ethel are both at home.'

"That was how we learned the name, but we might have asked at the nearest post-office if we hadn't been so flustered.

"We said we wouldn't give our own names, but Miss Ethel'd know us all right, an' we were shown into the drawing-room and I'd ha' given a good deal for a whisky.

"Pretty soon in comes a girl—*the* girl; fluffy golden hair, pink an' white complexion, big blue eyes; just like a doll. A pretty little girl, but not the girl I'd imagined that Jack 'd have wanted to marry. The kind of girl some men'll go crazy over for a while, an' then forget; unless she grows tired of them first.

"She guessed from the very start that there was something wrong; from the first words I said; from the sight of us two gawks standin' there with our mouths open.

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" 'We're from the *Narcissus*,' says I, an' the girl goes white.

" 'The *Narcissus*!' she says. An' then, 'Jack!' she says. 'There's nothin' happened to Jack, has there?' She must have seen from our faces. 'Is—is he dead? He's not dead, is he?'

"A lump came to my throat.

" 'Yes,' says I.

"An' the girl dropped into a chair an' began to cry. Simple, wasn't it?

"An' then her mother arrived. Any one could see she was the girl's mother: round-faced, plump, fat little woman with a double chin an' a soft voice an' the fluffy, golden hair; just what the daughter would be like in twenty years.

" 'What is it?' she says very quickly.

"The girl could only sob her heart out. Poor thing! I was sorry. But what could *we* do?

" 'We're from the *Narcissus*,' says I.

"And there again we didn't have to explain. She understood.

" 'He's not—not dead, is he?' she says.

" 'Yes,' says I, 'yes, Jack Fraser died last night—this mornin'.'

"The girl's mother doesn't speak, but—I swear this is Gospel truth—a look of relief almost passes over her face.

"An' the chief, he says, 'Yes, Jack's dead, an' the finest man that ever went to sea.'

"An' then, 'Ethel,' says the plump little lady, touchin' the girl on the shoulder, 'Ethel, dear,' she says, in her soft voice, 'it's the Lord's will. We can't understand, but—whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth. He knows what is best for us.'

"At that the girl sits up in the chair with the tears streamin' down her face. 'He doesn't,' she says in a wild kind of way. 'It's not true. How can you be so cruel? You always hated Jack, always. You never wanted us to marry. An' now—now he's dead an' you say it's for the best. I hate you,' she says, 'I hate you!'

"An' then she huddles into the chair again with her hands over her face an' the mother motions us to'rds the door.

" 'Where is he?' she whispers. 'On board?'

" 'Yes,' says I, very anxious to get out of the house into the fresh air.

" 'There'll be the funeral,' I says, 'an' if——'

"The girl's mother kind of shrugged her shoulders, as if she didn't care one way or the other. She looked at her finger-nails a second.

" 'I suppose she'll want to,' she says, 'an' God knows, if it's any comfort, I won't stand in the way. You'd better write when it's to be. Now go.'

" 'Let's have a drink, for Heaven's sake!' says the chief, an' we made for the nearest bar. Yes, I've had many drinks I needed less than that, I tell you.

" 'What about it?' says the chief. 'Did you see how the old lady looked?'

"We caught the next train to London Bridge an' crossed over to the smoky old Underground. Ugh! That old bridge with the river an' the smell of fish from Billingsgate, an' the ships an' the Margate steamers! It was awful late when we got aboard, down by the docks, an' I was dog-tired an' could hardly keep awake long enough to get my clothes off.

"WELL, the next mornin' there was a piece in one of the papers, little paragraph about Jack's death. How he'd hoped to live long enough to see home an' died. A newspaper-feller had seen the flag half-mast when we came up the river an' had boarded us to get the story. I was glad it was in, somehow. Not that it would make any difference, of course, but—well, I dunno."

Mr. Harrington broke off and glanced at the chief and then at me.

"Not gettin' tired, are you?"

The chief, who was leaning against the wall with his arms folded and his eyes shut, grunted, "Go on, mon! What 're ye stoppin' for?"

"Well," said Mr. Harrington, "now we're comin' to the strangest part of the whole thing. Mind, I'm not judgin'. Don't think that! I can't. I'm just tellin' what happened, without knowin' why or how.

"In the forenoon, 'long about ten o'clock, the mess-room lad comes down to the engine-room lookin' for the chief.

" 'There's a lady on board askin' for the Captain, an' he's ashore, so she asked for you.'

" 'What's she want?' says the chief, surprised.

" 'Says she used to know Mr. Fraser.'

"An' at that the chief mops his forehead with a piece of waste an' tells me to come along. But it wasn't the fluffy-haired little girl or her mother.

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"On the bridge-deck was a lady dressed in black; big black hat with a big black feather in it, big black velvet coat, black skirt. A big tall woman she was, handsome, an' yet—yet I didn't know where to place her.

" 'Are you the chief engineer?' she says. An' the chief says yes, an' that I'm the second and is there anything we can do.

" 'I've come to inquire after a Mr. Fraser,' she says. 'I saw the news in the paper, and I thought I'd like to find out if it was the same one.'

"An' then, 'The flag's half-mast; is he on board?'

"Well, he was. I forget now, it's so long ago, why they hadn't moved him. The doctor had been the day before, of course, when we came in, an' we'd a clean bill of health, anyway. So I just says, 'Yes'm; Mr. Fraser's still here.'

" 'May I see him?' she says. So, not knowing what else to do, we takes her into the room where Jack was lyin' in his bunk. I lifted the sheet an' she looks at his face; like a boy's it was, thin an' very white, but with all the pain an' sorrow gone.

" 'The best man that ever walked,' says I.

" 'Poor old Jack!' she says, very quietly. 'Poor old chap! But you didn't give me a square deal, did you?'

" 'Are you a relation?' says the chief at last.

An' the woman laughs though there were tears in her eyes. 'A relation!' she says. 'Bless the man! I'm his wife!'

"Well, the chief and I, we just stared at her without speaking.

" 'Yes, I'm his wife,' she says in a dull voice. 'He left me seven years ago, when I wasn't much more than a girl. We didn't get on together,' she says, 'but I tried my hardest. He wasn't very patient with me.'

"We went into the cabin, with the sunlight shinin' in through the ports; the big, handsome woman in black—Jack's wife—me and the chief.

" 'Mrs. Fraser——' says I; but she shook her head.

" 'Not my name,' she says, 'nor his. He changed it after the trouble. A lieutenant in the Navy he was, an' had just got his second stripe when it happened. The court martial found him guilty an' he was dismissed his ship. An' after that,' she says, 'he resigned his commission and in a few months went off as second mate of a tramp.'

" 'So Jack was in the Navy!' says I, very bewildered. 'An' he never told us!'

"The woman goes on, 'I only saw him once after that, an' then he said it would be better if we didn't meet again. I never argued. What was the good? He was funny in some things, Jack was. Did he think of me?' she says, 'a girl left without any money, a girl like I was! We didn't even trouble about a divorce. Couldn't have afforded it anyway!'

" 'What did you do?' says I, an' my voice sounded as if some one else was speakin'.

" 'Do!' says the woman with a hard little laugh. 'Do! What could I do? I was back on the stage as soon as I could get a job. I'm on the halls now,' she says, 'coster-girl mostly; song an' dance. That was how I met Jack at Portsmouth.'

"She gets up. 'Well,' she says, 'I'll have to be goin'. An' the funeral? Where'll it be? I'll pay all expenses. I don't expect poor old Jack has any money. He always was broke when I knew him.'

"An' then—this shows the madness of the whole affair—she says, 'It might make quite a good paragraph in the papers.'

"Funny! Yes, it was funny all right! But the chief and I didn't think so. All the time she was talkin' I kept remembering the fluffy-haired little girl at Denmark Hill, breakin' her heart for Jack, the girl whom he had promised to marry. Yes, that's what I was troubled about: that poor little thing crying her eyes out because Jack Fraser was dead.

" 'Mrs. Fraser,' says I. The chief being long past saying a word. 'Mrs. Fraser—for I'll call you that, I've no doubt Jack was your husband.'

" 'Don't be silly!' she says. 'Of course he was!'

" 'Well,' says I, 'we'd take it kindly if—if you'd stay away from the funeral.'

"She looks at me with a queer kind of expression.

" 'Why?' she says. 'I'm his wife, aren't I?'

" 'Jack,' says I, 'was my greatest friend, an' nothin' can ever alter that, but he was only a man, same as me, and it's not for me to judge him. He may have treated you badly,' says I, 'but he's dead—an' you wouldn't wish him any harm now, would you?'

" 'No,' says the woman, 'I would not. But what's that got to do with Jack's

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funeral? I'd like to show him that even if I am what he helped to make me, I can forgive.'

" 'Mrs. Fraser,' says I, 'it's this way.'

"An' then—well, then—yes, women are quicker than men—she guessed.

" 'Another woman?' she says. 'Was there another woman?'

" 'Yes,' says I; 'an' she's only a kid, an' she believes in him, and if she knew, it would kill her.'

" 'Was he—was he goin' to marry her?' she says.

" 'Yes,' says I, 'he was.'

"An' then the woman—I couldn't make her out—the woman began to laugh; one o' them laughs that makes you feel queer to listen to.

" 'Poor old Jack!' she says. 'Poor old chap! He always was a bit mad. I wonder if he'd forgotten that he couldn't marry again without a divorce from me? I shouldn't wonder!'

"She gets up from the chair where she's been sittin'. 'I never was one to spoil a joke,' she says. 'I'll stay away from the funeral.'

"She walks out of the cabin into Jack's room, an' through the open door the chief and I see her lift the sheet an' bend down over him. An' we went out on deck into the sunshine an' noise of the river.

"Minute or two later she comes out with the tears smearing through the powder an' stuff.

" 'Poor old Jack! I'm sorry he's gone. He was the only man I ever really cared a —— for! I'm sorry for the little girl, too. But she's lucky.'

" 'Lucky!' says the chief. 'Because he was to marry her?'

" 'No,' says the woman. 'Because he's dead an' can't!'

"Then she went ashore, in the big black hat with the big feather, an' the velvet coat. An' the chief and I leaned on the rail and watched her, with the sun shinin' as peaceful as though men never did no wrong and all women were good an'—— Oh! I dunno, we're all a bit queer somehow, aren't we? Jack an' the little girl whom he'd been goin' to marry—an' his real wife alive!

"THE funeral! In a dreary East London cemetery. God send that I'm buried at sea, where it's clean an' wholesome an' not too crowded. We were all there: the crew, deck-hands an' firemen and all. The fluffy-haired little girl an' her mother were there too. An' the parson had a cold in his nose, and it rained without stopping. An' the coffin was covered with the Union Jack, same as if he'd still been in the Navy. Poor old Jack Fraser! An' she—his wife—had sent a big wreath with his name on it an' nothing else.

"Yes, I'll not forget that funeral. And as we stood bareheaded by the open grave in the rain, listenin' to the parson snufflin' out 'Man that is born of woman,' an', 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,' I found myself wonderin' what it all meant: Jack's marriage, his death, the little girl waitin' for him—everything. Would he have married her? Didn't he know that he couldn't?

"Well, that's all about Jack Fraser. The fluffy-haired little girl is married now. I always have a look at the births, marriages an' deaths every time I open a paper, an' when I was in the *Nagasaki* a year or so later I read of her marriage.

"An' the other one—Jack's wife—I saw in a music-hall up north only a short time back.

" 'Don't think much of her,' says a man next me. 'The —— you don't!' says I. 'If you don't like her, keep your mouth shut, or else clear out!'

"Which he does, quick; somewhat surprised.

"But it's a rum world, isn't it? An' that's what I had in mind when I spoke about not knowin' a man when you've been shipmates with him."

Mr. Harrington glanced at the clock.

"Mother of Moses! Have I been talkin' all that time?"

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THE LITTLE YELLOW MEN

A Crisis of the Pacific Coast

by

John Kenneth Turner

CHAPTER I

VISION-TIME

WARD ELDER dropped a twenty-pound box of raisins on the small pile awaiting the pleasure of the inspector, straightened up and mopped his forehead with a blue bandanna-handkerchief. He glanced down at his coarse jumper, the front of it dark with the soak of sweat, then up at the thermometer, which hung just within the door.

"Whe-ew! A hundred and ten in the shade!" he breathed. "Hotter and hotter every day. It's good the fruit's coming in slowly this morning. Otherwise some of these fellows would be toppling over."

His eyes swept the broad floor of the packing-house. At his left the stemming-machine was shuffling lazily. Beside it two seeders wheezed and grumbled as the rollers laid hold of the dribbling stream of loose raisins and squeezed out the seeds. Here and there a man was wheeling a truck or carrying boxes. At the far end the box-makers were beating noisily.

But beyond these activities the capacious room was comparatively lifeless. The vast majority of the laborers were lounging about on the floor or in the doorways, panting in the heat. At the long tables the women and girls were indulging in a period of relaxation—talking and laughing, retouching their hair or snatching bits of lunch. The rush of the season had not yet begun. Delivery was slow to-day.

Ward's glance, flitting over the groups of women, abruptly stopped. His eyes had come back to the same object that had been their lodestone ever since he had entered the packing-house as a common laborer ten days before. That lodestone was a feminine face; a face cool and unperspiring where all other faces perspired; cheeks cream-white where other feminine faces were browned by the sun; skin smooth and unlined where the packing of raisins by the piece breeds wrinkles with deadly haste. An oval face, high-browed and framed in sun-gold hair; face and frame set upon a neck in shape perfectly rounded, in color creamy white faintly blushed with the pulsating life within.

To Ward Elder this face had first seemed like a picture merely to be gazed upon, to

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be noted from afar, to be admired, perhaps, but not to set the nerves a-tingling. It was to be looked at coldly because of its great distance. Even when the foreman had designated him as the individual who was to carry the boxes of clusters and set them before this personage, as well as to bear away the product of her hands, his feeling of distance had not changed. Only when he noted her eyes lingering upon him for the twentieth time, mildly interested, half probing, half challenging — those strange tranquil eyes of green, jade-green—did he rouse to the realization that she was a human being, alive, within reach of his hand, inhabiting his own sphere of influence.

This realization had brought diffidence in its path, for Ward was scarcely more than a boy. Boundless are the hopes of youth, and the more youth hopes, the more youth fears. For hope is a dare and a challenge to fate. It is a gage tossed in the face of fortune and presumes a struggle whose issue no man knoweth.

Ward knew not why he feared. He knew only that when the jade-green eyes were upon him he trembled; that when the girl spoke to him, his invariable answer was a stutter; that his working-day was not ten hours of lifting and carrying and perspiring, but ten hours of seeing her, stealing glances at her, moving under those strange, serene green eyes.

The girl, Isola Kent—it was Isola May Kent in the big family Bible that reposed on the center-table at home—was the star packer of the house. As such, her neat, deft fingers touched only the fanciest of raisins, which she packed temptingly in layers in beribboned and bepictured boxes called cartons, which, holding one pound, were subsequently sold to fashionable Eastern buyers for twenty-five, thirty and sometimes even forty cents each.

At this particular moment Isola, unlike most of the other women, was busy working, standing in her place, a pile of clusters on her left, a litter of rejected raisins in front of her and a tier of fancy cartons beside her right elbow. Her nimble hands were moving swiftly, but her supple back was straight, her head erect, her face cool and unruffled, her sun-gold hair drooping about her shapely ears. It was the same picture that had compelled the covert glances of Ward Elder more and more frequently for the past ten days. It was compelling his glances now, and as he looked he saw that there were cartons to be carried away from her table; not many, but enough to furnish a valid excuse for his sidling up and gathering them into his arms.

"AWFULLY hot, isn't it?" she remarked pleasantly, as he was about to move off.

"Awfully," he agreed huskily. Then, as she did not look up, a riot of courage seized him. He set his burden down again and faced her squarely across the table.

"Awfully," he repeated. "It never gets this hot where I came from."

"No? Where's that?"

She raised her eyes and for the instant that they were upon him he wished that he had not stayed.

"New Hampshire," he replied unsteadily.

"You're a long way from home and mother, sonny," she remarked, a curious, half mocking smile curling her fine lips.

This angered him, but made him braver, saving him from his contemplated flight. Before he was able to reply she added:

"And did you come all the way out here just to work in a packing-house?"

This angered him all the more, but he controlled himself.

"Not quite," he retorted. "This thing is only temporary with me."

"Just off on a little vacation, perhaps," she pricked, still smiling; "getting in trim to turn the world over."

This was torture. She raised her eyes again and he decided that they were as cold as they were green. But even as he looked he saw them soften slightly. Evidently she had observed his anguish and relented, for she leaned forward.

"It's a poor job," she declared in confidential friendliness. "Take my advice and get out of it. It's fine for a woman, but it's no good for a man. How much do you get, now? A dollar and a half, I suppose?"

"Yes, a dollar and a half," confirmed Ward.

"Right," she nodded. "Now here's a case of the woman getting more than the man, and for less work. How much do you think I made yesterday? Five and a half; and there are times when I've made as much as six. That's dandy."

"But you're exceptional," he reminded her.

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"Yet lots of women make three and four right along. There are mighty few who get as low as a dollar and a half."

"You must have begun pretty young," ventured Ward.

"At eleven," she informed him, "and I was an expert packer at fourteen. Do you know, for five years my folks have never given me a cent; and sometimes I've helped them. Big family, you know, and my father a retired preacher. I paid for all my own books and clothing during my four years in the high school and, besides, I have two hundred dollars in the bank, all earned here."

He gazed at her curiously.

"You don't look as if you had ever done much work," he estimated.

Indeed, the only sign of stress and strain which he could detect was a slight compression of the mouth, and this, for the reason that there was a sufficiency of her lips that was red, seemed rather a virtue than a blemish.

"Oh, I keep cool about it," she laughed, "but you'd better believe I don't intend to work here every Summer and Fall in my lifetime. I only wish that I were a man so that I could do something in the world worth while; a man like—like you."

At this she cast a quick glance at Ward, and, though he blushed, his chest swelled perceptibly. He did not know whether she meant that she wished she were a man like him, or whether she just wished that she were a man. Nevertheless, he felt himself growing in importance.

"How did you happen to leave home?" she inquired suddenly. "Run away?"

"Run away!" he sniffed, but good-naturedly. "Do you think I'm small enough to call it running away when I leave home? Why, I'm twenty-one."

"Just my age," she smiled. "But the question remains, did you run away?"

"No, I just left," he answered. "You see, my mother died and I didn't see any reason for staying on and working the farm for my stepfather. That was two years ago."

"Two years ago! You've been out in the world two whole years and haven't conquered it yet!"

"I wish you'd quit laughing at me," he protested, laughing himself. "I know I haven't done anything so far, but I'm going to, sometime. Fact is, I got a bad start in my career and now it's up to me to begin all over again."

"A bad start?"

"Yes. You see I started out to be a fighter."

"A prize-fighter? Oh!"

"A prize-fighter. You needn't look so shocked. It's better than hard work, isn't it? Well, after I got to California I made a pretty good start. I was a pork-and-beaner——"

"A pork-and-beaner?"

"Sure; a preliminary man; a young fellow who lives on a meal-ticket furnished him by the fight-promoter and gets just enough for fighting to square up for the tickets. Well, I wasn't a pork-and-beaner long before everybody felt sure that I was destined to figure in the first rank in my class. I was a little light, but that didn't scare me. I beat everybody they put against me in short order, and at last they slated me for a main event. I stood to make some money that night and get among the real fighters, but——"

"But what?"

"The fight never came off. A man was killed in the last preliminary and that ended the show. Right then I quit the game. It made me shiver to think of it. Why, suppose it had been *me* that killed him—a chap that never did me any harm and that I had no grudge against at all. Why, it might happen any time. No, I quit the game."

"A retired prize-fighter!" whispered Isola, serio-comically. "I suppose you fought under an assumed name?"

"No. Why should I? I wasn't ashamed of it. Sometimes I think I'll go back to it. There's only one thing that keeps me from going back to it. I think of the sort of folks that follow the game—the hangers-on, I mean. A fighter has to keep clean if he wants to stay in the game and win, but the hangers-on—why, they never realize that you are a human being. They treat you just as if you were a trained bulldog—yes, a trained bulldog. No, I've quit the game for good. I'm going to try something else."

"What will you do?"

"Oh, I don't know exactly," he replied, abashed again for an instant. Her jade-green eyes became less mocking and he went on.

"I feel most like doing something out-of-doors—something big and important."

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"Goodness!" she exclaimed, yet her face melted a little in sympathy.

"I'd like to go down into some terrible hole in Death Valley," he confessed boyishly, "where nobody else dare go, and find a rich mine, or sail away somewhere and discover a brand-new country, or be chauffeur of the fastest airship in the world, or something like that."

He smiled whimsically and she scrutinized him with a sudden augmentation of interest. He was short and compact, with red hair and a face that bore a hint of freckles. His nose was short, his mouth amiable, his eyes a friendly blue and so wide apart that they gave to his face an odd, ingenuous appearance extremely engaging.

"When I was in my teens," he confessed, for she nodded encouragement, "I used to wish for a war so that I could shoulder a rifle and go out in defense of my country."

"You want to be a hero," she accused, but in unquestionable friendliness.

"Perhaps you'd call it that," he admitted, coloring.

"I'm glad," she encouraged. "I like heroes."

"And I feel just a little like that right now," he said; "as if I wanted to do something big for my country—to defend it; to be a patriot."

"Well, you might have a chance to do that almost any time," she returned lightly. "There are the Japs, you know. You might have a chance to defend your country against the Japs."

"Oh, the Japs!" he scoffed. "The poor little Japs!"

"There you go!" she came back, a little fiercely. "Just like an Easterner! All Easterners laugh when we people out here on the Coast mention the Japs!"

"One would think——" he started to say.

"Wait!" she almost hissed, cutting him short, "wait till you know something before you speak. Open your eyes! Look! Think! Then come back and tell me whether you mean what you've been saying—that you really want to do something for your country."

"Why—why—why——" he stuttered, completely confused by her amazing burst of seriousness—— "I never thought. Sure, I mean all I said. But—the Japs! But I'll wait, I'll wait!"

CHAPTER II

THE FACE IN THE WALL

"THE Japs! To defend my country against the Japs! I wonder if there is really anything in what she said? I've heard that sort of thing before out here in California. I wonder now——"

The day's work was over and Ward Elder, hungry for new sights and sounds, instead of going early to bed, as an older man would have done, was threading his way across the poorly lighted railroad-reservation for his first visit to Fresno's Chinatown.

Crossing the last rail he passed through a dark alley, emerging beneath the flare of a street-lamp which fell like a search-light upon the faces of two passing men. The cheeks of one were thin, pinched and ashen as those of a dead man. Lumpy sores disfigured the face and neck. The eyes were watery and shot with crimson. The black, shiny hair tumbled unkempt over the rather well-formed brow and temples.

"I'm dead fer a smoke, Bill," Ward heard the man whine. "I ain't hit the pipe fer four days. Gimme the price of a pill, won't you, pal?"

Eagerly Ward listened to catch the reply, but the pair passed out of ear-shot. It was his first glimpse of color of that Little Asia whose lights and shadows he was destined to explore so deeply and so very soon.

Rounding a corner, Ward found himself on a street lighted to a semi-day by a glow which filtered through many doors and windows. There were the heathens, hundreds of them, lying like panting sheep in the hot September night. The narrow porches, steps and benches in front of the squat buildings were thick with them — heads bare, blouses missing, sleeves rolled high and sprawling legs naked to the knee.

Reaching the main street, he found the pulse of life running higher. Within doors, butchers, fishmongers, merchants and restaurant-men were plying their trade. The sidewalk was a stream of chattering Chinamen. Bright lights gleamed from the upper stories. Through those open doors and windows above Ward caught glimpses of gaudy Oriental hangings, while from somewhere there came down to him the eery whine of a Chinese fiddle.

Floating on the bosom of the stream,

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Ward was seized by a by-current and drawn into a gorge-like alley, whose great length alternated in patches of brilliant light and blots of inky blackness. He peeked through the door of a barber-shop at a young Chinese dandy who was having his head scraped smooth. He watched a pantalooned lady varnishing her hair with some gummy, tar-like substance, then smoothing it with a stick and shaping it into various forms on her crown. He paused before an aged Mongol with shriveled lips, gaunt eyes, parchment neck and long spiral nails, who was squatting beside an old oil-can, cooking and selling some yellow cakes.

In a sportive whim he tried to beg one of the greasy-looking cakes, tantalizing the tottering ruin, until the latter, with many croaks of his shattered voice and waggles of his unstable head, drove him away. His outlook in life was essentially that of a boy, and he found as much diversion in every outlandish spectacle as if it had been a new scene in a vaudeville-show. No gust of seriousness ruffled the smooth waters of his tranquillity—not until his eyes lighted upon the face in the wall.

It was a yellow face, yellow as ocher clay, wrinkled as a wash-board, thin as the blade of a hatchet. The cunning, restless eyes glittered weasel-like from sunken, bone-rimmed sockets. The gnarled teeth showed, like those of a carnivorous animal, between gaping lips. A long, thin neck, thrust far forward, gave the face the appearance of being hung on the end of a pole. It seemed a thing apart from a human body; more like the detached visage of an apparition poised there in the little square hole cut in the wall of a V-shaped corridor. Its whole attitude spoke of guilt, of readiness for flight.

"By George, there's something crooked doing here!" breathed Ward to himself, sidling toward a patch of darkness on the opposite side of the alley and a little beyond. "No man ever looked that way without being afraid of somebody or something."

He found a narrow passageway between the two buildings—one of those tiny capillaries of travel which are numerous in every abiding-place dear to the heart of the Oriental—and took refuge in its shadow. Peering out from this point of observation he noted that beyond the hole which framed the yellow face was a door, that along the corridor and in and out the door there straggled, ant-like, a never-ending procession of Orientals. Yes, it was that line of men toward which the gaping hatchet-face was turned. It was the countenances of the Chinese and Japanese visitors which the weasel-like eyes scrutinized so keenly. It was the apprehension that one of those visitors might prove an enemy that endowed the face with an air of being about to dodge back from its peep-hole.

The narrow hole was the only visible entrance to the building, while not a single window broke the enigma of its broad green front. The edifice was set back from the alley a few feet. Emblazoned in gold above the portal were three gigantic Chinese alphabetical characters. Upon a rough bench beside the entrance to the corridor lounged a sleek, well-dressed Chinaman, quietly smoking. Wide as is one pole from the other was his well-fed countenance from the ghastly shape in the hole, yet there was something strangely similar about the two. Fat and Lean displayed the same uneasy air of guilty anticipation.

Now Ward noted that from one of the green boards back of the idler protruded the end of a small rope, knotted to prevent it from slipping back through the hole whence it came. The restless eyes of the smoker swept the alley, now to the north and now to the south, but always they returned again to the innocent-looking knot in the face of the building. Often the fellow shifted his position, but never did he move beyond easy reach of the knot. When his gaze was afar, his fingers sought it, caressing it, toying with the uneven strands at the tip.

A noise of heavily banging doors distracted Ward's attention. Glancing far down the alley he saw, towering above the straggling Asiatics, a tall, helmeted man in blue coat and brass buttons sauntering toward him. Once more he heard the thunderclap of pounding walls, and now he observed that between him and the minion of the law stood several other large green buildings, similar in appearance to the one nearest him, though not quite so large. Again came the noise, nearer now, some three or four rods in front of the advancing policeman. At last the riddle was solved. Ward saw the smoker on the bench stealthily slip his right hand under his left arm, grasp the

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knot he found there, give it a smart jerk, withdraw his hand and lapse into a brown study.

But the moment the rope jerked, the yellow face dodged away from the peep-hole. A trap-door slid over the opening and there resounded the loud bang of a heavy inner door swinging violently shut. The procession of visitors dissolved like magic. The corridor became deserted. The policeman passed by. The lookout on the bench slept on. But as soon as the broad back of the bluecoat was safely past, the smoker suddenly awoke, straightened up and pulled his bell-cord a second time. Soon the weasel-like eyes were again at the hole in the wall and once more a procession of visitors trooped down the passageway.

"GREAT farce, eh, kid?" wheezed a voice at Ward's elbow. Startled, Ward turned and found himself face to face with the man whom he had heard trying to beg the price of an opium-pill a half-hour before.

"Great farce, I say," repeated the fellow, peering anxiously at the young man. "The Chinks slam the door in the cop's face, but they never quit their business for a holy minute. The cop knows what's in there, but he can't stop 'em because he ain't got the evidence. But say, kid, got a quarter? I'm dyin' fer a smoke and I ain't got the price."

"What's that place over there?" eagerly inquired Ward, ignoring the question.

"That?" replied the human wreck, blinking his glassy eyes in amazement. "Say, kid, ain't you been weaned from the bottle yet? That? That's Fong Kee's fan-tan joint, the swellest in Fresno—one of the swellest in all America. You ought to pipe off the insides, but you can't. There ain't six whites in town can get through that door. I was one o' the six last week, but they cut me out. The yellow devils! When I was flush and flyin' high, nothin' was too good fer me. But now I'm down and out, they don't know me no more. They even put the cops on me trail. Say, kid, ain't you goin' to give me that quarter?"

"A quarter? It seems to me two bits is a lot of money to pay for one smoke."

"It sure is," whined the other, "but ye can't get 'em fer less—not since them choke-off laws put out the pipes o' half the Chinks in America. Time was when you could smoke fer a nickel, but now—— Kid, if you got anything at all, give it to me quick. You never had the yen eatin' on yer insides or you'd hand me yer last red. Ain't you got two bits that ain't workin'? Ah, thanks, kid! I'll make it even with ye some day. So long."

Ward watched the man steal along the shadows, scuttle across the alley at right angles and disappear down a basement-stairway. When he was gone, the youth once more turned his eyes toward the green edifice across the way.

"The swellest fan-tan joint in all America!" he repeated, remembering the beggar's words. "And I ought to see the inside. I guess I ought. Just to see a lot of those lean devils quarreling over their money!"

He strolled on down the alley, but after a while he returned again to stare at the green front and the face in the wall.

"The Japs get in; why shouldn't I?" he told himself. "I'm no taller than a lot of Japs, and some of them are dressed just as American as I am. Hold on! There's my hair. I've got to hide that."

Brushing upward a few brilliant, brick-red locks, he jammed his slouch-hat down on his head as far as it would go, then turned low the brim to conceal the upper part of his features.

As a group of half a dozen Japanese swept by him he slipped out from the shadow and pressed close behind the rear-most one. He jammed his hands deep in his pockets and inclined his head forward, not daring to take his eyes from the heels of the man in front of him. They marched straight for the green building.

Crunch! Crunch! What a noise his shoes made on the gravel! At last his feet were on the boards. Closer he pressed to the Japanese in front of him, striving to keep the man between himself and the face in the wall. Still he imagined the weasel-like eyes boring through his shield and cutting their way into him. One elbow brushed against the wall.

At last the heels that had served as his compass vanished and it came his turn to stretch out a hand for the door-knob. For a moment he was oppressed with the nearness of a hideous yellow face. He felt the door close at his back, heard a babble of voices about him, brushed against a silken coat-sleeve, drew in a quick breath of air

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laden with tobacco-smoke and knew that he was safe inside the gambling-den of Fong Kee.

CHAPTER III

A GAME OF FAN-TAN

SAFE? Perhaps. He did not know. What would they do to him when they found him out? He was but one against hundreds. He could not hope to fight and beat them all.

His gaze upon the richly carpeted floor, he edged prudently sidewise until his shoulder pressed against a wall. Slowly he moved along the wall, stopping only when he reached the partial shelter of an upright column. Cautiously, inch by inch, he raised his eyes, until from under his drooping hat-brim he swept a furtive glance about the spacious room.

Tables thickly dotted the expansive floor; round tables, most of them, surrounded by yellow men on stools, who bowed their backs and craned their turtle-necks toward some absorbing drama in the center. Behind the stools crowded spectators, smoking, chattering, laughing, watching the play, exclaiming often. Others passed in continuous streams from one table to another. At the far end of the room frowned a hideous black figure carved out of wood, sitting full fifteen feet high, with back against the wall. Ward recognized the threatening shape as a Chinese idol; perhaps the God of Chance; perhaps the guardian of these sacred precincts against intrusion by the white devil.

Ward's glance, sweeping the hall, search ed for the friendly face of a white man. Not one was to be found in all these gathered groups. He was alone, absolutely alone, in the enemy's Holy of Holies. Closer he pressed to the pillar and still lower he pulled his hat-brim over his telltale features.

The door was near, not farther than forty feet away. He might make a run for it and never have a heathen hand laid upon him. But no, he would face it out.

Forsaking his pillar and following in the wake of a group of new arrivals, Ward soon found himself in a dense jam about one of the tables. A singsong voice, calling out Chinese words, was suddenly interrupted by a volley of American curses. Throwing away discretion, the youth elbowed vigorously in a mad impulse to see the fight he felt sure was about to begin. He trod heavily upon somebody's toes and became aware that the irritated owner, a young Japanese, was peering up into his face.

"Now I'm in for it," he thought, doubling his fists and spreading his feet apart in preparation for any sudden onslaught. But there was no outcry, no one disturbed him and presently he was pressing close against the back of one of the gamblers.

The puppets in the drama going on in the center of the table turned out to be a handful of buttons, a china teacup and a small mahogany stick. The stage was a square sheet of brass, the operator a wizened Chinaman who was constantly repeating the unvaried performance of raking the buttons under the inverted cup, raking a part of them out, sweeping in stacks of silver on his left and adding to piles of silver on his right. To the uncomprehending youth the play seemed monotonous and uninteresting, but the expressive facial contortions of the men on the stools, the grotesque gestures, the frequent exclamations, now of disgust and now of pleasure, told him that no civilized drama was ever more keenly appreciated. Not the meaningless juggling of buttons with a stick, but the play of sordid emotions on unchristian countenances held the young Easterner fascinated.

Suddenly Ward felt a gentle tugging at his coat-tail. He gave a quick glance behind him. A pace in the rear, his face flushed and his hat at a jaunty angle on the back of his head, stood the opium-slave who had begged a quarter of a dollar from him a while ago. He made no sign of recognition and Ward turned back to the game. Again came that gentle tug. Cautiously the youth pushed his way out of the crowd. Behind him followed his acquaintance of the alley.

"Hey, kid, how'd you get in here?" whispered the man, when the two were alone.

"Sneaked in," replied Ward, grinning under his hat-brim.

"Well, you're a nervy cub! If any o' Fong Kee's hatchetmen get ahold o' you, they'll chop you into hash. A couple o' gumshoe-men got in here one night last month and a hundred Chinks piled on 'em at once. Took their smoke-wagons away, tore off their duds and scratched 'em up considerable before they chucked 'em out.

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If I hadn't 'a' froze on to my friend Tai Loy, I'd never got inside myself. Say, that smoke braced me up a lot!"

"What do you call that button-game going on over there?" inquired Ward, paying no attention to the warning.

"That? That's what they call fan-tan. You bet on the number o' buttons under the cup, whether they're even or odd, and that's all there is to it. Fan-tan's the game for the Chinks. They get quick action on their money, and that's what tickles 'em. Ditto for the Japs. No wonder Fong Kee's got as big a bundle as the richest raisin-packer in Fresno.

"There he is now—old Fong Kee himself, dealin' out fan-tan to a crowd o' Japs," whispered the sage of the underworld. "You don't often see *him* working. He's a slick one. Politics? They call him the mayor o' Chinatown. Keeps all these joints runnin' in spite o' the law and the churchfolks."

Fong Kee proved to be of middle age and fat, waddling fat, with grease oozing from every pore of his mottled skin. As he swiftly manipulated the buttons he laughed oleaginously and cracked jokes in Chinese and English for the benefit of the dozen sons of the Mikado who were gradually increasing the pile of money in front of him.

"Gee! One o' them's a plunger!" exclaimed Ward softly, shifting his position so that he could command a view of the player who bet most heavily of the twelve, and whose growls of dissatisfaction were correspondingly most frequent.

THE man in question was slender but well-knit of body, with a slightly arched nose and thin and colorless lips—an unusual type among the Japanese. He was attired in a tailor-made American suit of gray. A brilliant red necktie topped his fancy waistcoat and a college derby reposed on the back of his head. Beyond the coarse black hair and the hint of almond shape about the eyes, there was little to indicate that he was of Oriental origin.

"That there's Osaiki, the dude o' Japtown," whispered the opium-smoker. "He's a swell and a high-roller, I'll tell you. Has a big education in both languages, and they say he's got royal Jap blood runnin' in his veins. But he's bughouse on fan-tan. When he once gets to losin' he don't know where to stop. Well, kid, I'm a-goin' ter duck me nut. Better let me see you safe out o' here."

Ward shook his head.

"No, I'll take my chances," he replied. "I want to stay a while longer."

It was the playing of the fashionably dressed young aristocrat that claimed Ward's attention. Osaiki bet more on each count of the buttons than did all the rest of the gamesters put together. His long straight hair was brushed back from his lofty white forehead, his tense, keen face was projected far over the edge of the table, while his two black eyes shot vexation from beneath a pair of nervous, twitching lids. When he won, he raked in the pile with a contemptuous glance, as if despising it for its small size. When he lost, he smote his well-groomed fists impatiently on the table or let out a string of American oaths.

"He's certainly losing fast," thought Ward. "Acts as if he were going broke. Digging into his pockets still again—— Ah! He has money yet. He's going to put the whole wad on one play! He's lost it!"

Osaiki slipped from his stool, stood unsteadily on his feet and turned his pockets wrong side out. All were empty. He sat down again and gazed into the cunning slits of Fong Kee.

"Lend me a hundred, Fong." He spoke in English, in a low, hard voice.

The mayor of Chinatown shook his head pleasantly as he raked together the buttons for another deal.

"You no wan' borrow; give bad luck. You got more, anyhow. Lose this time; bad luck. Next time you win."

"Lend me a hundred until to-morrow. Lend me fifty. Don't you see I have no more money with me? I've been one of your best customers and if——"

"No no, no trust. Trust a good customer, lose a good customer. You trust, you bust. I no trust. Anyhow, you owe me already. You had money and you no pay."

"All right," hissed the enraged dandy, jumping to his feet. "You can keep your money—for a while. But one of these days —" stepping so close that Ward was barely able to catch the words— "one of these days I'll take charge of your whole blamed joint and turn you out! Savvy?"

As he spoke Osaiki turned his eyes significantly upward to a life-size oil-painting of a Japanese soldier which hung upon the

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wall. Ward was struck with wonder at the change that flashed over the visage of Fong Kee. The smirking mouth became a flabby twist of terror.

"I lend you——" faltered the big Chinaman.

But a commotion among the spectators cut his words short. A heavy-set, mustached Japanese was shouldering his way through the crowd. At sight of him the trembling Fong Kee arose hastily and bowed low, while the Japanese gamblers left their stools and fell back with the spectators, a silent and respectful circle. The threatening dandy turned pale.

The small, beady eyes of the newcomer took in the situation at a glance. His bushy brows drew together in a frown. To Fong Kee he spoke briefly, in a tone of absolute authority. The mayor of Chinatown, king of gamblers and friend of politicians, cringed before him in the most abject servility.

Turning to Osaiki, the stranger swept his arm in a gesture of command, then moved away. Osaiki shuffled at his heels. Ward, amazed and puzzled by what he had seen, slipped out of the circle of Japanese and followed.

CHAPTER IV

THE YELLOW PAPER

THE pair moved directly toward the door, but did not arrive there, for the big stranger hesitated, looked at his watch, then turned and led the way to a table in a rectangular alcove in the side of the building.

Finding an empty stool set in the shadow of one of the pillars, Ward sat down upon it and watched from beneath his lowered hat-brim. The strange Japanese seated himself at the table and motioned Osaiki to follow his example. The big man spoke in low tones. He seemed to be scolding the dandy, and the latter hung his head as if in shame.

While dressed plainly, almost shabbily, the strange Japanese was one whom any observing person, seeing once, would stare at again and again. His powerful body, rhinoceros-like in its bulkiness, was not yet rounded by fat nor ill-proportioned in any way. Above his heavy, protruding chin, a ferocious black mustache bristled aggressively. When he removed his brown derby hat for a moment, Ward saw that his forehead was square and that his coarse hair stood upright on top of his head in stubborn bunches. As he spoke to the gambler he was constantly glancing sidewise, as if expecting some one to come and occupy the third chair at the table.

"I wonder who he is?" thought Ward. "I never saw a Japanese like him before. I always thought that all Japs were such nice, smiling little fellows, but this one is not a smiling fellow."

As Ward puzzled he kept his eyes upon the two men in the alcove. He saw the stranger half rise suddenly and beckon. Following the gesture he observed a third Japanese approaching the pair at the table, bowing and smiling as he came. The newcomer was dressed as flashily as Osaiki. He carried a gold-headed cane, diamonds sparkled from his fingers and from his shirt-front, his spectacles were gold-rimmed and, as he minced forward, his pale olive face was wrinkled from the corners of his mouth to the corners of his eyes by the succession of smiles which chased one another across his countenance. Arriving before the table, he bowed low to Osaiki's companion, then to Osaiki, then shook hands with each, and finally, daintily laying on the table the gloves which he had been carrying in his left hand, he accepted the seat proffered by the big Japanese.

Seated, he produced a cigar-case and presently all three were puffing away most industriously.

After a few minutes of what seemed aimless chatter, the big Japanese made an almost imperceptible gesture to Osaiki and the latter immediately arose and excused himself. When he was gone, the attitude of the two remaining persons at the table instantly changed. They leaned closer together and fell to discussing earnestly. Presently the larger one drew from an inside pocket a note-book, a pencil and some yellow sheets of paper. Bending forward, the two examined and discussed the papers. Finally the owner of the documents folded them again, put them in his note-book and, as the two arose together, slipped them back in his inside pocket.

That is, he thought he slipped them back in his pocket. But, as the two moved away, Ward observed a folded bit of yellow under the table.

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LEISURELY the two Japanese strolled toward the door, stopping on their way to look over the shoulders of a group gathered about a fan-tan game. Their backs were toward him and in a moment Ward had crossed the intervening space and was under the table; the yellow sheet was on the way to his pocket. In that instant he glanced guiltily toward the two men who had left a few minutes before, and as he looked he saw one of them turn toward him.

It was the palaverous little Jap of the gold-headed cane and the diamonds. Yes, the game was up; he was caught. The little Japanese walked straight up to Ward and, as the latter got to his feet, he held out a hand and spoke some words which Ward could not understand.

Ward knew that he was asking for the paper. But instead of handing it to him, he hung his head low and tried to edge away. He did not know what was in the paper, but once his hands were on it he hated to give it up. He had a feeling that it might hold a secret that would be worth his while to solve.

But the Jap was not to be denied. With a swift movement he snatched Ward's hat from his head and the American stood revealed for what he was.

Shorn of his disguise in an instant, Ward glanced about for an avenue of escape, but saw none. He saw only the great room again, just as it had appeared a few minutes before. The hue and cry that he had imagined would be raised the instant he was exposed did not greet his bare red head. Several Chinamen had already noted him and were looking at him curiously; that was all. They made no movement toward him, and for the time being he was confronted by the one Japanese only.

But that individual concentrated within his face as much alarm as Ward had expected to see in all the Orientals present.

"American! Spy!" gasped the Japanese. Then, finding his voice, he loudly shrieked some words in his own language.

That started the avalanche. Ward ran for the door, but they were after him. At every step he was dodging, striking out, breaking away, receiving blows upon his head and back. It was not so hard to elude the hands of the Chinese, but the Japs sprang at him with the accuracy of wolves. As he ran he thanked his stars that there were few Japanese at this end of the hall, thanked his stars also that he was a trained boxer.

Once a Jap got a grip on his sleeve and he thought he would go down, but his right landed squarely on the Jap's chin and the latter went down instead. The running fight was a matter of seconds only. The big door shut with a bang, but he was already through it and past the face in the wall. The sentry at the end of the alcove tried to bar his path, but Ward shoved him aside and reached the alley.

But they pressed after him even in the alley. Though there were not so many of them now, they were all Japanese. They had swung the big door open again and were after him. Down the middle of the alley he sprinted, glancing this way and that in search of a policeman, but seeing none, nor the face of any white man. Curiously the Asiatics of the shops he passed gazed after him, then, moved by shouts from the rear, several joined in the pursuit.

Ward saw an opening just ahead, a dark street which broke the narrow thoroughfare upon which he was running. If he could reach it he would soon put himself where there were other faces besides those of that cursed yellow. He was almost there. But no, at a shout from behind, a half-dozen young Japs crossing the mouth of the alley turned and closed in upon him.

He tried to dodge past, but one or another was always before him. Fiercely he whipped out with rights and lefts, and it was with grim satisfaction that he felt his hard fists spat against bone and flesh.

But it was no use. There were too many of them. Still struggling, they bore him to the ground. They were on top of him, raining blows upon him, beating him, crushing the life out of him. He tried to breathe, but the weight upon him was suffocating. A hot anger shot through him as he decided that they intended to kill him.

The blows seemed dull now and the voices far away. He was drifting, floating somewhere. But it was terribly hot, then cold.

The refreshing breeze touched his forehead and he opened his eyes. He heard the sound of blows and a voice.

"Get back there, you yellow dogs!" said the voice.

One man was lifting him and another was threatening some one with a revolver.

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He caught a glimpse of their faces. They were Americans.

Thank God! They were Americans!

HALF lifted from behind, Ward got to his feet, but the world was whirling and tipping about him. Though a steadying hand was on his shoulder and his feet were reaching out this way and that in efforts to maintain his balance, it was no use. He fell, and his fall was broken by the same hand that had been upon his shoulder.

"It's a wonder a policeman wouldn't show up here," he heard a voice say. "The boy seems to be hurt."

"I'm not hurt," corrected Ward, sitting up and looking dazedly about him. "I don't want any policeman."

"No?" questioned the voice. "Well, then, we'll take you home ourselves."

They lifted him to his feet and this time he did not fall.

"I have no home," announced Ward. "I'm working in one of the packing-houses."

"Ah!" The voice seemed to understand. "Then, Carmichael, we'll take him over to our camp for the night. Hustle him along. If these heathens take a notion to rush us, there'll be trouble."

Steadied by a strong grip on one arm, for his world was still whirling and tipping, Ward was led out of the mouth of the alley and into the street beyond. He did not turn his head to look about him, but out of the corners of his swimming eyes he saw a blur of faces—Chinese and Japanese.

"Fresno isn't this way," he objected vaguely, as his new-found friends hurried him along.

"Not exactly," admitted the voice, the only one of the two that had yet spoken. "But our part of it is. Camptown's this way."

So they were going to Camptown. He had heard of Camptown. Several of his fellow laborers had asked him where he "roosted" at night—"roosted" was the word they used—and when he had replied that he slept in a cheap lodging-house downtown, they had asked him why he did not live in Camptown. He had not been able to tell. But now he was going to Camptown. He would find out what it was like.

Three or four blocks west of Chinese Alley—for that was the historic name whereby the long grotto-like avenue which cuts the center of Fresno's Chinatown from end to end was known—the buildings began to thin out, and by the time a second distance of similar length was traversed the blocks were wholly barren, without sidewalks and even with great oak-trees growing here and there upon them. The man who was walking behind took hold of Ward's other arm and together the three proceeded toward a light which danced among the trees.

"A camp-fire!" exclaimed Ward, when they had come closer.

"Yes," affirmed one of his companions. "Do you hear them singing?"

Ward listened, and faintly there came to him a quavering of voices—voices of children, he thought. Now they passed a tent, small and dark and silent. Then they came to a camp-wagon under a tree. Two mules, tied to the wheels, were rattling their chains and nosing over some wisps of hay under their forefeet. Ward heard the mumble of masculine voices and saw two human forms stretched out beside the road, lying without any covering upon them. They passed more tents, more camp-wagons, men lying asleep with blankets and without blankets, men, women and children walking toward the camp-fire or from one camp to another.

"Folks are getting acquainted early in the season," remarked one of the men, nodding toward the cheery fire. "They'll have mighty little time for it a week from now, when the rush is on."

"There'll still be some who'll have plenty of time to get acquainted," suggested the other, dryly.

"That's so," admitted the first one. "They can't all work; there's too many of them. It's a wonder some of them wouldn't pull out for the peach- and prune-centers, a little farther south. There's work going on there yet."

"There's work, but more workers," declared the other. "They're overcrowded there as well as here. And it's the same in the prune-orchards of Santa Clara, and the apple-farms of Santa Rosa and the wheat-fields all up and down the San Joaquin. Why, some of these people are already pulling out for the hop-yards of Sacramento—traveling two hundred and fifty miles for a three weeks' season. Others are hurrying south of the Tehachapi in the hope of getting work in the sugar-beets, and after that

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in the celery, and after that in the orange-orchards. Well, some will get work and some won't. Since Japan began pouring its hordes into this country, it has become a mighty poor place for a white man who has to work for a living."

A noise of clapping hands from the camp-fire distracted their attention. A man in overalls and jumper, with a red bandanna-handkerchief about his neck, had been reciting a poem in dialect. They were very near now, and Ward felt a strong desire to join the circle of faces. But his companions drew him on.

"There's blood on your face," said one. "We'll have to look you over and see if you are caved in in any way. Ah, here we are at last. Carmichael, if you'll dig up some soap and water and a towel, I'll look this fellow over. Here, youngster, take a seat on this box while I get a lantern."

THE camp of Ward's rescuers turned out to be a more pretentious one than the majority of those they had passed in their journey thus far through Camptown. There was not only a covered camp-wagon, but a tent, and a small stove and table set in the open.

Stripped to the skin, Ward stood in the tent while the man raised and lowered a lantern and glanced up and down his back and legs, pinching and prodding him as he did so.

"No bones broken at all," he remarked, "only bruises. Come here, Carmichael!" he called suddenly. "Just look at this. Feel this arm, won't you?"

"Whe-ew!" exclaimed Carmichael. "Is it an arm or is it a bar of iron? Who've we got here, anyhow, Crowe?"

"Take hold of his legs, too," commanded Crowe, "and his back. No wonder the Japs didn't break him in two. You're all right, boy; you don't need a doctor. All you need's a hunk of salve on that cut on your forehead. But where did you get all this physical development, anyhow?"

"Oh, I—don't know," blundered Ward. "Working on the farm, I guess and—fighting."

"Fighting? Fighting Japs? Seems to me now, I saw you thrashing around pretty lively just as I came along there in Chiney Alley."

"No, not fighting Japs," said Ward. "I'm from the East. Boxing, you know."

"Boxing! That's interesting. But you'd better slip into bed here. We can talk later. There's no use of your walking back through Chinatown to-night. The Japs might get you again, you know—" he laughed—"and we have plenty more blankets. Slip in."

The man called Crowe gave him a fatherly pat on the shoulder and Ward did as he was told. Bending over him, Crowe then salved the cut on his face and tucked him in between the blankets.

"Sleep tight," he commanded, dragging a second roll of bedding out of the tent and under the stars. "And, mind, don't dream of Japs!"

The man's voice was slightly husky, as if at one time it had been a little overstrained. It was the same voice that he had heard ordering the Japanese away from him at the point of a pistol. The voice had been hard then; now it was gentle. All the way to Camptown, Ward had wanted to look into the face behind that voice. And now when he saw it, it made him feel that he had won a friend. Only in the half-shadow had he seen the face, and thus it came before him as he lay in the darkness of the tent, drowsiness stealing over him. It was a dark, sallow face; lean, angular, with jet-black hair streaming over a high, broad forehead. There were deep wrinkles on the forehead and about the eyes and cheeks. But the wrinkles were kind and the eyes themselves were large and lustrous black, deep-set and a little weary, yet brimming with a human sympathy almost tragic. Powerfully was Ward drawn to the face, and deep within he tingled at the memory of the wonder his sturdy body had caused the man.

"So his name is Crowe," muttered Ward to himself. "Just an ordinary name—Crowe." And with that he drifted away into dreamland.

CHAPTER V

NEW PALS

WHEN he awoke, the first thing that Ward thought of, after he realized how he happened to be lying beneath a tent with nothing between his body and the hard ground except a blanket and a thin sprinkling of hay, was the folded bit of paper which he had snatched from under the table at Fong Kee's. Wildly he looked

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about for his coat, and when he saw it hanging on a tent-hook out of reach he scrambled out of bed and fumbled hurriedly for the inside pocket. Yes, the paper was still there. With a sigh of relief he shoved it back into its place, reserving its examination for a more opportune time.

While Carmichael was getting breakfast, Ward amused himself by inspecting the camps of California's nomadic white laborers. Afterward he sat down at the rough table with his new friends, and during that morning meal he became better acquainted with them. They were packing-house workers, too. Carmichael, the antithesis of Crowe, was short and broad, with light hair and blue eyes. Both were very friendly, and when they invited him to come and camp with them, share and share alike, he accepted with alacrity. They started to question him about his trouble with the Japanese the night before, but when he showed a disposition to dodge the questions, they turned the conversation gracefully.

When Ward, in his turn, puzzling as to why a man of Crowe's appearance should be working as a common laborer, went to asking personal questions, he found that he, also, was turned aside. After breakfast, however, while Crowe was washing the dishes, Carmichael beckoned him out behind the tent and, with an air of mystery, whispered in his ear:

"I'll tell you who that man is, if you want to know."

"Go ahead," commanded Ward eagerly.

"He's Dudley Crowe, who was editor of a daily in S—— for years. He's the fellow that was at the bottom of those graft-prosecutions that set the country by the ears. He made it so hot for the higher-ups that they boycotted his paper and tried to assassinate him. He got some of them, but they wrecked his paper and his health, too. When on top of everything else his wife died, he had to quit. Could have had a good job on any of a hundred different papers, but instead he decided to come out in the country with me and work for a season at common labor so's to get his health back, and to size up things down this way. We were kids together, you know. But, say, he's a wonder. Knows everything. And you just ought to see him play with a baby! He's down now, but he'll get up again. He'll break out again with something big one of these days. Just watch."

THAT was a busy day in the packing-house, and Ward had little opportunity to speak with Isola Kent. He felt bolder now. Having once broken the ice, he was consumed with a desire to have another chat with her; to pass a remark or two, to nod, anything besides merely stealing glances at her over the loads of boxes that he carried about in his arms.

But they rushed him too hard. She, too, was working away as if to outdo even her own record, and he thought that she did not intend to notice him at all that day. Just before the six-o'clock whistle blew, however, when he approached to carry away a stack of neatly-packed cartons of fancy muscatels, she took time to ask him who had been so unkind as to bump his forehead.

"Oh, some Japs did that," he replied, truthfully.

"Some Japs!" she chaffed. "Then you're already beginning to defend your country against them? I hardly hoped you'd take my advice so soon."

"What have you got against the Japs, anyhow?" he blurted out earnestly.

"Why ask that?" she countered. "Isn't it enough that you yourself have something against them?"

"I? What have I against them?"

"Then you don't hold that broken forehead against them?"

"That? Oh, I got that as one of the fortunes of war," he grinned. "I don't blame them particularly for that."

"Then I'll tell you of something that you *can* blame them for," she declared, her lips tightening. "You, a strong man—" his chest swelled— "earn less than a third as much money as I, a weak woman! No, don't tell me that I'm exceptional. You, a strong man, earn less money than the weakest woman in this whole establishment. Did you ever hear of a condition like that before? Blame Mr. Little Brown Man for it!"

THAT night, as Crowe, Carmichael and Ward sat about their rude table in Camptown eating their supper in the twilight, Carmichael unfolded a bit of news.

"Did you hear," he asked, "that the Japanese grape-pickers have shoved up their price for picking to three cents a tray?"

"I have," replied Crowe. "That will give the fairly fast pickers among them an

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earning capacity of anywhere from four to five dollars a day."

"While we sovereign Americans continue to worry along on a dollar and a half!" grunted Carmichael. "Talk about the pauper labor of Asia! And the high wages of the American workingman!"

This gave Ward an opportunity to propound the question that he had been trying to formulate ever since he came in sight of Camptown.

"What have the Japs to do with our wages in the packing-houses being low?" he inquired.

"Simple as A-B-C," replied Crowe promptly. "The Japs take some five thousand jobs picking grapes, jobs that, in their absence, would be in the possession of white men. Five thousand jobs being closed to the whites, that many more of us are found looking for work in the packing-houses and elsewhere. It's simply a matter of supply and demand. There are so many of us that we're dirt-cheap. We get a dollar and a half a day, and board ourselves."

"But how is it that the Japs get so much higher pay than we do?" asked Ward.

"That is because they have established a monopoly. Fifteen years ago the grape-picking in this valley was done by white men and their families. The Japs came in, cut wages and nosed out the white workers —just as they did in so many other fields; in the fruit-orchards, the beet-fields and the celery-farms. Then as soon as they had chased the whites out, they raised wages back to where they were—even higher."

"But why can't we take advantage of those higher wages ourselves?" persisted Ward. "Why can't you and I give up our dollar and a half a day with the packer and go out and get four or five dollars a day from the grower?"

"Because the Japs won't stand for it," put in Carmichael. "If the growers should hire us, the Japs would go on strike."

"Let them," suggested Ward.

"But the growers can't afford to let them," explained Crowe. "You see, grapes, like other products of the farm, must be harvested at a certain time and harvested quickly. Suppose now that the growers should fire all their Japs and give us a chance to make three or four dollars a day. There wouldn't be enough of us to pick the crop. Half of the crop would be lost before the growers could import enough laborers from the outside to do the work. And if they ever did get the white laborers here in sufficient numbers, the Japs would turn right around and slash wages again—so low that the growers couldn't resist taking them back. And so once more the white laborer would be chased out of the valley."

"Tra la la! It's a beautiful system, now, isn't it?" said Carmichael.

"You must understand that these Jap hordes are well organized," pointed out Crowe. "Did you ever see any of their camps, boy? They establish camps all over the district in which they're operating, camps of as high as five or six hundred men. They're like an army, and there are Jap contractors who take the place of generals. The growers keep in touch with the generals and when they want a hundred men overnight, they get them. It's convenient, but the growers are beginning to pay the price in higher wages."

"Well, if the Japs are so powerful, why don't they come in and take the jobs in the packing-houses?" inquired Ward.

"They haven't got that far," answered Crowe. "They choose first the sort of work in which big gangs of men are required, because in such a field it's easier to come in and win, with their compact organization. They'll get to the packing-houses after a while. It's only a question of time—time and numbers."

"It's only a question of time until they get everywhere," muttered Carmichael.

"Yes, time and numbers," repeated Crowe. "If the number of Japanese in California never rose above one hundred thousand, and the number on the whole Coast never rose above two hundred thousand—those are about the present figures—their presence here might never rise to the dignity of a national calamity. But suppose that in the next five years—or ten years, or twenty years—the number of Japanese here should increase to five million. Why, the race-question in the South would not be a circumstance to our race-question here. They of the South can partially control the negroes, for the negroes are weak. The Japanese are strong. They would wipe us off the map."

"You don't think for a minute that the Japanese want to take our country away from us?" interrogated Ward.

"I certainly do," nodded Crowe. "At

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least a part of our country—our islands, and possibly our Pacific Coast country. I believe that's a thing they're looking forward to."

That night after Ward had gone to bed he arose quietly, lit the lantern and stole a look at his yellow paper, which he had forgotten. He spread the sheet out on one knee and pored and puzzled over it for a long time.

"It seems to be a map," he told himself at last. "This looks like a body of water and this seems to be a row of hills. This looks like the mouth of a river or a strait. And these bunches of dots might be towns or settlements. Here are what look like some Japanese words and here are arrow-marks. But I can't make out the meaning of it. I don't remember having seen any place like this before. I wonder what it all means, anyhow, and why the Japs should chase me on account of it? I wonder if it has anything to do with—with——"

He went back to bed and for a long time lay in the dark turning the matter over and over in his mind.

CHAPTER VI

A BIT OF JAPANESE CHINA

WARD dreamed of yellow papers and yellow men. He dreamed that he stood on a low hill and, gazing afar, saw a thin, golden-yellow stream creeping over the horizon. There was no sun in the sky, and smoke-black clouds hung over the yellow stream. The stream widened and swept forward like a mighty river of yellow paint, straight over the plain toward him. As it came closer, the surface of the river broke into ripples like a million waving yellow flags, and then the river became distinguishable as a flood of tumbling, fluttering yellow papers, every one the size and shape of the paper he had stolen in the gambling-den of Fong Kee.

Closer fluttered the paper flood, and as it did so each paper formed itself into a face, a yellow face, a Japanese face. Each face developed a body and a pair of legs, running legs. The legs ran, the faces frowned, the mouths howled, the eyes were bent on him; he and his hill were in the direct path of the yellow swarm.

At the base of the hill they did not stop, but flowed up it like a tidal wave. Now he could distinguish the features of every individual in that sea of yellow wolves. The big hulk in the lead—that rhinoceros body, that bunchy, bristling pompadour, that protruding chin—no, they were not to be mistaken; it was the strange Jap who had frightened Osaiki and Fong Kee. And there was Osaiki behind him, and the smiling Jap with the spectacles and the gold-headed cane. But he was not smiling now! And there was Fong Kee.

Now they were reaching for him, they were seizing him. But as they seized him their faces blurred. It was the cold impact of an ocean wave that he felt. His feet were still on the ground, but all around him, as far as his gaze could travel, tossed an angry yellow sea, rising, rising. Afar he distinguished a boat and in it Crowe and Carmichael, paddling like demons. But they were too far. They could never reach him. Now the tide was over his chin, over his mouth, over his nostrils. He could not see. He could not breathe. His chest was bursting. Then he felt himself seized and dragged above the surface. He awoke, gasping, panting. It was morning and Carmichael was calling him to breakfast.

THE twinkling street-lamps that evening found Ward once more exploring Fresno's Chinatown. He had made up his mind to find the thick-bodied, fierce-mustached son of Nippon, to follow the man and observe what he did and where he went. He would seek out the fishy-eyed smoker of opium, too. He would lay the yellow paper before that sage of the underworld and demand that he read out the meaning of it.

For a time he kept to the main streets, peering into the quaint shop-windows and drifting along with the cosmopolitan crowd, which ever succumbs to the lure of the noodle-bowl, the long pipe, the shrieking fiddle, the little green lottery-ticket and other enticements of the land of the burning punk. Finally he plunged into Chinese Alley.

Beyond the last row of fan-tan houses and on for several blocks to the southward he found well-lighted stores, shops, restaurants and pool-halls, the halls swarming with Japanese, smoking, talking, laughing light-heartedly. And there were hundreds and hundreds of them. There were almost no Chinese in sight now. The places were kept by Japanese; the customers were Japanese.

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He circled the block and found that it was all Japanese and densely populated. There was a Japanese general-merchandise store which was larger than any store he had seen in the white section of Fresno. There were two Japanese banks. There was a Japanese daily newspaper. There was a Japanese theater. There were Japanese barber-shops. The Japanese were everywhere, but nowhere did he see the fierce-mustached mystery of the fan-tan den, nor any of the faces that he remembered having seen that night. Neither did he see the face of the opium-fiend, though he looked for it on every hand.

Back to the alley Ward wandered—Jap Alley, he called it, and such was the name commonly applied to the southern extension of Chinese Alley—and through a narrow, brick-walled passageway he dived into the very heart of the teeming block. Here he found a miniature city, with many tiny streets and devious avenues barely wide enough to permit of one pedestrian squeezing past another. The homes were sections of continuous brick buildings, each scarce ten feet wide and fronted with one window and one door. Ward wandered on, lengthwise of the alley, and soon felt himself breathing a different atmosphere. He was in a second miniature city. It was much the same as the other, only cleaner, and the passageways were empty. The shutters were drawn, and, peeping through the doors, which were usually left open on account of the Summer's heat, he saw, now and then, a little Jap woman.

"Ah, this is where the Japanese swells live—that is, the few of them that have families," Ward told himself.

Suddenly, above the quiet of the evening, Ward heard a voice raised in a note of song. It was a musical voice, soft and rich, with a melody of ardent yearning. He stood still and listened, trying to locate the direction whence the song came, but it merely seemed to float in the air above his head. Like the love-coo of a dove, it was wafted to the ears of the warm-blooded adventurer, and he made up his mind to seek out and look upon the face of the owner.

Ah, now it was nearer! Again he stood still with eager ears. He could make out the syllables as they dropped, with a faintly defined ripple, from the lips of the unseen singer. But the words—they meant nothing to him as words. Yet they were subtle with a meaning that made him forget that he was not a bold knight, booted and spurred, on an excursion in quest of a lady-love. Wait! It was coming from there, from behind those closed shutters!

Ward pressed against the little brick front and put his eyes to a narrow chink between two shutters. For a full minute he did not move. What he saw was a young Japanese girl seated in a rocker, with her small hands clasped behind her pretty head, slowly rocking backward and forward. Her great dark eyes were turned dreamily toward the ceiling, and her soft, sensitive mouth moved with her song, which had dropped in pitch to little more than a crooning. Yet it stirred Ward strangely.

Suddenly the girl's song changed. Impulsively she caught up a big Japanese doll from the floor and, pressing it to her bosom, rocked violently back and forth, warbling with the clear, strong notes of the morning lark. At the height of her song she threw aside the doll with an impetuous movement, put her hands to her cheeks and burst into a fit of dry sobs.

An extravagant impulse to rush in and call upon the girl to tell him what to do, or whom to kill, to banish her sorrow, seized the youth at the window. In his agitation he leaned heavily against the shutters, causing them to rattle audibly.

IN A flash the girl had straightened up in her chair, passed her handkerchief over her face and was staring at the window.

Jerking open the shutters, Ward courteously removed his hat and presented a reassuring face: a frank countenance, huge shock of brick-red hair, laughing gray eyes —earnest now—tilted, fun-loving nose, strong chin and friendly mouth.

"What are you crying about?" he demanded, in husky, uncertain accents.

"Not cryun'," denied the girl promptly, with a little shamefaced grimace. "Jus' a litta humsick."

Not knowing what to say to that, Ward stood silent, staring at the thick, glossy bangs which poured over the girl's forehead to her arched eyebrows.

"You betta go," she suddenly announced. "What you doun' around hyah? Betta go, you boy."

"A boy!" he repeated. "What are you

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but a girl? You're younger than I am. What are you doing around here? Why, you're so small that I could carry you away in my pocket!"

"Betta go," insisted the girl, but good-naturedly and without an air of finality. "Jap watchman catchy you."

"Jap watchman! Show me the Jap watchman I'm afraid of!" He laughed at the very idea.

The girl laughed, too—in derision.

"You 'Melicans all same swell-heads," she scoffed, baring a graceful ankle and patting a tiny, slippered foot emphatically on the floor. "'Melicans no can fight. Jap-an whip China; Jap-an whip Russia." Her pronunciation of the word "Japan" was halting, like that of a small child practising a new word. "Next time Jap-an whip 'Melica—soon. 'Melicans no can fight."

A maudlin masculine voice, raised in a torrent of curses far down the alley, froze the heated reply on Ward's lips. A flush of shame mounted to his cheeks. Realizing that the speaker was coming his way, he stepped back from the window, closed the shutters and stood silent in the shadow.

When the American, a great, rough bully, arrived opposite the door of the tiny, sweet-voiced singer, he halted, blinking his eyes rapidly and leering through the door.

"Lemme get in," he muttered, fumbling at the screen.

Who was he? Did he belong there? For one long breath Ward waited; then he drew a quick gasp.

"Can't come in," he heard from inside, in a tone so harsh that he hardly recognized the voice. "You in wrong place. Get out."

"Come on, open up," insisted the brute. "Lemme get in. Unfasten this door or I'll smash it."

The man heaved his weight abruptly backward, ripping the screen from its fastenings. At the same moment there was a terrified scream from inside. It was then that Ward struck. He staggered the bully with a hard right in the face, then spun him around and put his shoulder in the hulking back. Down the passageway they rushed, the intruder howling profane protests and trying in vain to find a footing that would stop his flight. Reaching the open street, Ward, with a final shove, sent the wretch sprawling in the gutter.

BACK through the alley Ward ran, to find the girl complacently wielding a small hammer and fastening back the staple on the door.

"I looked after him, all right," reported Ward. "You needn't be afraid of that fellow straying down this way again."

The girl stopped with the hammer half poised and turned her great liquid black eyes upon him.

"You brave man," she commended, showing an even row of tiny, milk-white teeth in a grateful smile. "You no boy; you man. You make good fight. I think you some Jap. Ha! ha!"

"Not a Jap — no, *sir*," bristled Ward. "I'm an American. I wish you were an American, too," he added in a reckless spirit of chivalry.

"I think you betta go," suggested the girl shortly, resuming her hammering.

"Here, let me do that," commanded Ward. He seized the hammer and quickly pounded the staple back in its place. As he handed back the hammer his fingers accidentally touched hers and their eyes met at close quarters.

"Betta go," she prompted.

"All right; I'll go," he consented, "but I'm going to come again some time."

"No, you no come 'gen!" she warned.

"Yes, I'll come."

"No!"

"Yes."

There was no reply this time, but as he cast a glance over his shoulder he saw that she was standing in her doorway watching him go.

"Isn't she a peach!" he chuckled.

He walked to the end of the passageway and there, as he turned to take what he believed to be the shortest cut to Jap Alley, he glanced back for a second time at her lamp-lit doorstep.

He started in amazement. The person he saw standing there in the patch of light looking after him was not a baby-faced Japanese girl with big eyes and tumbling black hair, but a man—a Japanese man with thick, ponderous body, protruding chin and fierce black mustache. His hat was in one hand and Ward could even see that the hair bristled upon his head in thick, stubborn bunches. It was the man he had been looking for—the mysterious Jap whom he had seen at Fong Kee's!

Motionless stood Ward, staring. Motionless stood the Jap, staring too. Ward

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could almost read the expression on the other's face, but he himself was in the half-shadow and he wondered whether the man actually saw him and, if he did, whether he recognized him.

The Japanese was the first to move. To Ward's astonishment he turned squarely, passed within the lamp-lit doorway and out of sight, closing the door behind him. Ward, after staring a moment at the blank door, started to move on.

"Now I *will* come back," he muttered. "I'll come back for sure!"

THE next night Ward saw the mysterious Jap again. The big Oriental was leaning outward over the counter of a small cigar-stand in Jap Alley and driving a pencil rapidly across a sheet of paper. Emblazoned upon the building above the man's head were the words: "H. Hamagawa, Cigars and Tobacco;" and still higher up were some Japanese hieroglyphics.

"A one-horse cigar-dealer!" exclaimed the young American, in disgust. "He's nothing but a one-horse cigar-dealer. Hamagawa! Humph!"

"But *is* he a cigar-dealer?" the youth asked himself after a moment.

Ward waited until he saw the man sell a package of tobacco and then he decided that he was really the proprietor of the store.

"I would never have believed it," thought Ward. "He doesn't look like a real merchant to me. He reminds me more of a boss of a railroad, or a chief of police, or a soldier. Now I shouldn't have been surprised to meet him in the uniform of a soldier. And if I did, I'll bet there'd be straps on his shoulders."

Ward observed that, now and then, a man passed through the store and disappeared behind a door at the inner end of the counter. Sometimes the man was a Chinaman, sometimes he was a Japanese, sometimes he was a negro, sometimes he was a white man and sometimes there were three or four of him in a group.

"I wonder what that means?" Ward asked himself. "I do wish I could find that opium-smoker. I'd make him tell me about this Hamagawa and this Hamagawa's business."

As he stood there the man Hamagawa glanced across the alley and then gave him a steady stare. Ward hastily drew his hat-brim low, wondering whether the Japanese recognized him and trying to guess what he would do if he did. But after a prolonged look the man turned back to his writing and Ward, believing that he was not remembered, took his way eagerly toward the home of the Japanese girl.

"I may learn something from her," he thought; that was his excuse for hurrying.

Peering through the shutters, as before, Ward gasped as his eyes found her face. She was sitting there in her rocker, facing the window, clad in a bright kimono of red and green, her hands busy with a bit of needlework. Yes, she was a peach indeed!

She was Japanese to the finger-tips. Yet what a perfection of delicately curved lines and exquisitely blended colors! She was a Japanese work of art, a bit of Japanese china matchlessly tinted, a perfect Japanese doll, but glowing with the magnetism of human life.

Ward stepped into view before her door.

"*Kumbowa*" (good evening), he hailed, proud to display his familiarity with a newly acquired Japanese word of greeting.

She started, but her soft lips melted into a smile of recognition when she saw his face. "*Kumbowa,*" she replied. "I say you some Jap-anese—so!" She laughed.

As if to dismiss him with that, she turned back to her needle. But he remained standing there, resolute.

"What foh you no go now?" she inquired sharply.

"I want to talk to you."

"What you wan' say?"

"I want you to tell me who is Hamagawa."

"Hamagawa? I no know Hamagawa. Who Hamagawa?"

"You do know him. Of course you know him. Why, I saw him go through this door last night."

"Hamagawa—oh!" she laughed. "I no savvy. Hamagawa! Sure, he my faddah."

"Your father?"

"Sure; he my faddah."

"And you forgot the name of your own father?"

"What you say me?"

"And you forgot the name of your own father?"

"Yeh, I no remembah," tranquilly.

"Say, who is this Hamagawa, your father, anyhow?"

"What you mean?"

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"What's your father's business?"

"He run cigah-stoah. He haf only litta money. He run cigah-stoah—sure."

"And what else does he do?"

She glanced at him quickly, suspiciously.

"He do no more," she declared. "What you lika know, boy?"

"Oh, nothing—much. If he's your father, where's your mother?"

"No haf muddah. She die, two yeah 'go, Jap-an. I lika muddah, but no see her no more—no more."

Ward fancied she was about to cry.

"Too bad!" he said sympathetically. "I'm sorry. My mother died, too—a long time ago, more than two years."

"Ah!" she looked at him curiously. "You no cry? Toku cry when muddah die."

"Yes, I cried," confessed Ward. "So your name's Toku. That's a pretty name."

"Yeh—Toku," she admitted. "Toku Matsui."

"But if your father's name's Hamagawa, why isn't your name Hamagawa?"

"Nevah min', boy," she chided sharply. "You lika know much—too much. You betta go."

"Tell me first who's Osaiki," he demanded. "Then I'll go."

"Osaiki? You know Osaiki?"

She was all interest.

"Sure."

"What you know 'bout Osaiki?"

"I know he's afraid of Hamagawa; that's one thing I know about him."

"Oh!" she deprecated. "Everybody 'fraid my faddah."

"Why! What does he do to make them afraid? Beat them?"

She shook her head and frowned comically.

"No! no! no!" she protested. "I think you crazy. "My faddah no beat men."

"But why is everybody afraid of him, then, especially if he is nothing more than a poor cigar-merchant, as you say? He must be something else. Tell me. He is now, isn't he?"

She shot him that suspicious glance again.

"Nevah min', boy," she reminded him. "While 'go you say you go. Why you no go?"

"But about this Osaiki," he persisted. "They say he's a prince, or a second-class Mikado, or something like that. What about it?"

She was silent.

"I know one thing, anyhow," Ward went on. "He spends most of his time gambling."

"Osaiki comes see me," remarked Toku coyly.

"Comes to see you?"

"Yeh, he lika mally me."

"Marry you? The scoundrel!"

"Yeh, he lika mally me. He no lika see you here. He—how you say it?—he jealous. Osaiki see you here, he fight."

"Fight me? Well, bring him on," returned Ward, nettled. "Just let him try to fight me!"

"Oh, Osaiki whip you, boy. Osaiki big jiu-jitsu man. Whip everybody. He whip you. You betta go."

"A big jiu-jitsu man?" sneered Ward, becoming boyishly angry. "I'm glad of it. The bigger the better. Just let him try anything on me! Why, I'll fight him in a minute. I'll show him what an American can do to a Jap! I'll challenge him right now. Next time you see that fellow Osaiki just tell him that I'm looking for him, will you? Whip me, eh? Just tell him that if he doesn't quit calling on you, I'll punch his head. Why, it's an outrage! A girl like you and—and that gambler! I won't stand for it!"

Toku's voice tinkled out in unrestrained laughter. She laid down her sewing and laughed, leaning back in her chair, her head tilted high, displaying to the full her rounded neck. She left her chair and, coming to the door, laughed again, looking the while into Ward's flushed face. Her laugh was not one of derision, but of pure amusement. When she was tired laughing she nodded at him encouragingly.

"Yeh, I think you make good fight," she declared. "But you go now. Toku go see friend. Good-by, boy. Yeh, I think sometime you make good fight."

And with that she shut the door in his face.

TO BE CONTINUED

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THE TREASON AT CASTEL GUARDIA

A SIR JOHN HAWKWOOD STORY

By MARION POLK ANGELLOTTI

TREACHERY is an ugly thing, take it how you will. You may call a man a murderer, and yet admit that he wrings from you a certain grudging respect. But call him a traitor, and the very beggars in the streets feel thay have the right to jeer at him as he goes by. To be sure, the friends of such a culprit will often defend him plausibly, urging that he was driven to his act by motives of revenge, policy and the like. But for my part I have never been able to see that such apologies bettered the matter greatly. Treason is treason. That, to a soldier's mind, is the final word, and I would a thousand times sooner lie comfortably at rest in my grave than live with even the suspicion of such a stain upon me.

I have, of course, been betrayed often enough. It would have been no less than a miracle had I—John Hawkwood—escaped such experiences in the course of my adventurer's life. But for the most part I have been spared that most horrible of all treacheries—betrayal by those I have trusted. And therefore I was not only in a black rage, but sick at heart too, when in the course of a campaign against the Pisans I found that I had to thank some officer of my household for the betrayal of my plans.

There was no doubt about it. The matter was as plain as day. We had swept down on a great Pisan fortress just across the Florentine frontier, knowing that possession of it would give us the whole chain of strongholds of which it formed the key.

Our sole hope had lain in taking the place entirely by surprise—and we had found it guarded and prepared, perfectly aware of our approach, and ready, as the Pisan general himself informed me from the battlements, to welcome the Captain-General of Florence in suitable fashion. There was nothing for it but to retire, with the full knowledge that one of my trusted lieutenants, having learned my plans the night before from my own lips, had promptly passed them on to our foes.

It was in a grim and ominous silence that I rode back to my camp, which lay at present just within the Florentine boundaries. Here my aides and myself were housed in the castle of a certain Messer Benedetto della Guardia, a rich citizen of the Republic,

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upon whom we had quartered ourselves unceremoniously after hearing a rumor that he was, though professedly a very loyal Florentine, on the best of terms with the Pisans across the border. I must say, however, that he had given us a most hearty welcome; and it had not taken me long to determine that, while very likely he had not been as cold to his Pisan neighbors as a good Florentine should, it had been less from disloyal intent than from an actual inability to be otherwise than hospitable to any living creature.

The whole household, indeed, struck me as a remarkably harmless one. Messer Benedetto himself was a fat, ruddy, moon-faced soul, stupid to a degree, but the best-natured person in the world. His lady appeared to divide her time between prayers and the working of tapestry, and the one daughter of the house, Madonna Lucia, was so lovely in her dark fashion that even an old soldier like myself could scarce think severely of a family to which she belonged.

To this Castel Guardia, then, we fared home after our repulse. The men resumed their encampment in the little valley beneath the stronghold, and I, having delayed to give some needed orders, at last dismounted in the court and entered the castle hall, where I found my lieutenants waiting for me in anything but a happy frame of mind.

THERE were but four of them, since for the time being I was campaigning with a limited force. Robert Brice, the eldest of the group, was an Englishman from Essex, who had been with me for eleven years. Piero Sansevero was an Italian, a shrewd, dark man of perhaps five and thirty, and one of the best soldiers I ever saw. The remaining two were Ridolfo di San Gaetano and Maurizio Bardi, wealthy young Florentines.

At present San Gaetano had gone to the window, and was leaning there moodily, as if unconscious of what went on about him, while the rest, gathered in the center of the floor, were regarding each other suspiciously and proclaiming in loud defiant tones what they thought of any one vile enough to turn traitor. In the midst of their uproar they caught sight of me, and fell suddenly silent, as I strode forward, halted before them and met their gaze with a look that must have been grim enough.

"If you are bemoaning our shame of to-day, signori," I said sternly, "you are crying over spilt milk, for the thing is done and can not be undone. There is no need that we should discuss this matter at length. You know as well as I that none save our five selves were acquainted with the plan of attack. For the first time in my life I find myself betrayed by my lieutenants. I must set a watch on my lips, forsooth, lest an unguarded word slip from them and be carried hotfoot by my comrades to my foes! You are, it appears, men who may be bought, traitors who take the gold of Florence and plan to betray her to defeat! Very good, that is a matter for your own deciding, but I tell you plainly that I will have no such gentry about me. If I may not trust you, I want none of you! Take yourselves off, then—a general without officers may be a luckless man, but at least he is happier than one surrounded by a nest of spies!"

My words could scarce have cut those who heard more deeply had they been strokes of a lash, but I can not say that any one man looked guiltier than another. Bardi flushed scarlet and clenched his hands, Sansevero muttered a fierce oath and Brice bit his lip in a savage fashion that meant much in a person ordinarily so stolid. As for young San Gaetano, he remained by the window with an averted face, and there was about him something so dejected that I came near experiencing a pang of remorse for my harsh dealing. Truth to tell, though I had until now been on the best terms with all my officers, this lad was my favorite among them. While I was determined not to yield an inch, it touched me to see such distress in one who was, I never doubted, as honest as myself.

"Well, signori, and for what are you waiting?" I demanded, as no one stirred. "I have said that you are not of my household. I have bidden you leave me. Go down in the camp, if you like, and see what secrets you can find there to sell the Pisans —remembering only this, that if ever I learn who has been to blame for to-day's affair I swear on my knighthood to hang him higher than Haman!"

At the words I distinctly saw San Gaetano shudder. He was taking the matter cruelly hard, as was natural in a lad of his high spirit and punctilio on all points of honor. Slowly, in a dejected train, the four turned toward the door.

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BUT they never passed it, for no sooner had the foremost of them, Piero Sansevero, got his foot on the threshold than he wheeled suddenly back.

"Sir John," cried he, with a sudden air of resolution, "I have a suspicion, I!"

If it was his desire to create a sensation by this announcement, he must have been gratified by its success. His comrades started, San Gaetano turned suddenly rigid and I must confess that my own nerves approached the breaking-point.

"In that case," I said curtly, "may I ask why you have been so leisurely about divulging it? For my part, I have not found the past hour so pleasant a one as to desire it prolonged!"

Sansevero made a gesture of deprecation. "Your pardon, Sir John, but this is a strange case," he declared mysteriously. "What I have to suggest appears incredible, yet in such an affair I dare not judge. I can only tell you all and leave the issue for your deciding."

I was about to request that he make a little more haste about it when I found the words taken out of my mouth.

"There is no need of so much talk," said San Gaetano, coming forward and planting himself between Sansevero and me. "I perceive that Messer Piero suspects me and that my game is played, so I will spare him the trouble of giving his proof. It was I, Sir John Hawkwood, who betrayed you! I confess it. Now deal with me as you like!"

"I will deal with you in a fashion little to your fancy, if you choose a time like this for your jests!" I began with heat, and then paused, as I saw his face for the first time. White, lined, desperate, it was not the face of a jester, and there was little enough merriment in the laugh with which he greeted my remark.

"If there is any jest here," he said bitterly, "I am its butt and not its maker, Sir John—nor do I see anything very diverting in a death by hanging! Again I tell you, it was I who sold your secret to the Pisans!"

For a moment we stood staring at him in blank amazement. Brice might have sat for the portrait of a man petrified, young Bardi of one deprived of his senses. Sansevero, as I noted with a feeling of exasperation, appeared charmed at having brought about a *dénouement.*

For my part, I would have been little more taken aback had the heavens fallen, for while I knew perfectly well that some one had been guilty of the betrayal, I would no more have pitched on this boy as the culprit than on the saints themselves.

"San Gaetano," I said roughly, when I had got my breath, "it is plain to me that you are out of your mind. Let me tell you that I am in no mood for foolery, and that if you think to gull me with a romance and later deny it, you are reckoning without your host! Come! If you expect me to credit you, let us have a few more details. Suppose you tell me in what fashion you accomplished your bit of treason!"

The young man hesitated a moment before answering me.

"I never heard before," he said then, defiantly, "that it was custom to make men prove a confessed crime, nor does the idea of tracing my treason step by step commend itself to me. But you shall be satisfied. Having learned your plans at our last night's council, I went straightway down into the camp and sought out a knave with whom I had already planned the betrayal. No, you will not learn his name from me—vile as I am, I have not yet fallen low enough to betray a tool! I told this man your intentions, then gave him the password for the night, which I had just learned from your own lips, and he took himself off to the Pisan fortress. On my way out of the camp, however, I encountered Messer Sansevero, and it is plain to me that something about my demeanor roused his suspicions. Is there anything else you desire to know, Sir John Hawkwood?"

He had spoken throughout in a high, defiant voice, his eyes never meeting mine.

"Yes," I retorted. "I feel more than a little curious as to what inspired you to this remarkable course! But perhaps you are going to ask me to believe that you betrayed Florence merely for your own diversion?"

The question seemed to prove an embarrassing one.

"No, Sir John, not that," stammered San Gaetano at last. "It was—it was for revenge!" His voice grew firmer. "You understand, I have now fought for the Republic for two years, yet it has not bestowed any honors on me in return. The Pisans offered me a rich reward if I would help

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them, and, moreover, a high place in the state!"

"Ridolfo! Ridolfo! Never heed him, Sir John, it has pleased the saints to take away his reason! Or maybe it is the beginning of a fever, brought on by this accurst sirocco we have had for a week past!" wailed Maurizio Bardi, who had been San Gaetano's sworn comrade from the time when both were boys at school.

Unless there were indeed something in the suggestions thus offered me, it appeared that the matter was settled. San Gaetano had confessed his crime in plain words, and announced its why and wherefore. My next words ought to be a curt command that my men should be summoned to take him out and teach him how to dance on air. Nevertheless, I felt a good deal less inclined to hang him than to shake him.

In the course of my life I had seen traitors a-plenty, but the conviction was growing on me that here was the most extraordinary of them all. For one thing, the tale with which he had just favored me was an unlikely one from beginning to end. For another, his extreme readiness to proclaim his guilt, before being called on to do so, struck me as remarkable, to say the least. Even a novice in the art of treachery is apt to have his wits sharpened by imminent death, and to perish in the last ditch uttering plausible excuses and calling on Heaven to prove his innocence.

San Gaetano, on the contrary, made a full confession because Sansevero had seen him issuing from the camp, without even waiting to see whether that worthy intended to accuse him! Considering all this, I no more believed that he had betrayed us than that I had done it myself, and I determined to make a final effort at reaching the truth.

"There is evidently nothing left unexplained," I observed to the others, with a shrug, "and it only remains for me to carry out the oath I swore a few moments since. Leave me, and await me without. I want a final word with this faithful lieutenant before giving orders for his end!"

The three filed mournfully out of the room.

WHEN the door had closed after them I turned on San Gaetano, who was leaning against the wall with his head bent and his hands clenched, looking as if he would have much preferred immediate hanging to any further conversation with me.

"Well," I cried, with the utmost brutality, "I make you my congratulations, signore, on this triumphant conclusion to your life! Your commander trusted you, and you sold his secrets. Florence gave you wealth and a noble name, and you have betrayed her for a handful of Pisan gold. And now, as a fitting end to such a career, you are about to die a dog's death, justly scorned by the meanest soldiers in my service! Truly, I have seen many sorry knaves, but not one as sorry as you!"

It had been my intention to add a good deal more to the same effect, with the purpose of goading him into a hot denial. But of a sudden I found that I could not go on. Though the boy faced me bravely, he flinched at each of my sentences. His face, ordinarily so gay and careless, was quite white, and as for the desperate wounded look in his eyes, it was too much for me. As much to my own surprise as to his, I went up to him and put my hand on his shoulder. "San Gaetano," I said as kindly as I could, "it would take an excellent liar to convince me that this ridiculous business holds a shred of truth. And you are the poorest liar that ever I saw! What you are about I can not guess, but you may take my word for it that the game is not worth the candle. Moreover, I think you have forgotten two things — that you bear a name which has always been honored, and that you have in Florence an old father whose pride you are. Now look me in the eyes, lad, and tell me once for all that this accursed treachery is no work of yours!"

San Gaetano dropped into a chair, laid his arms on the table and bowed his head on them, shaking all over with dry, noiseless sobs. Then he drew himself erect again, looking, not at me, but across my shoulder at the wall.

"I have answered you already, Sir John," he said stubbornly. "I am guilty. I am a traitor."

"You are a young imbecile," I retorted between my teeth, "and I have a mind to teach you as much by hanging you within the hour!"

With which benediction I turned on my heel, as much at sea as ever I had been in my life.

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II

WHEN I stretched myself on my couch that night, my mood was such that I thought it most unlikely I would be vouchsafed the blessing of sleep before dawn. It is said that the night brings counsel, and I devoutly hoped that in this case the adage would prove true, for the day had certainly brought none. I had succeeded in learning only one thing—Ridolfo di San Gaetano, at present a prisoner in an upper chamber with two guards to watch his doors, had still, in spite of his own confession of guilt, the full confidence of every one in the castle except Piero Sansevero.

When I had emerged from my unsatisfactory interview with this young man who was so eager to be hanged, the first person I had encountered had been Robert Brice, and he had confronted me in a humor well-nigh as black as my own.

"Can I have a word with you, Sir John?" he demanded rather than asked, and went on without waiting for an answer.

"In days gone by," he informed me defiantly, "you were wont to set some value on my opinion. To be sure, at that time you were mistaken as to my nature, believing me a faithful follower, a loyal comrade, one who, being an Englishman, would die by torment before betraying his captain! Now, of course, you are wiser. Oh, I should be dull indeed did I not comprehend what you think of me, after the honeyed words you gave us a little time since! We are traitors, men who listen to your secrets and sell them for Pisan gold, dogs to be driven out of your presence with present ignominy and threat of future death——"

"If you have something to say, man, say it and be done!" I interrupted impatiently.

His words and bearing were anything but respectful, and merited a sharp reproof, if no more. But the saints knew we had all been hard tried that afternoon, and, judging the state of his nerves by the state of mine, I felt inclined to overlook his insolence.

"Your pardon, Sir John. I know well such a man as I should address no honest human being!" snapped Robert Brice, not at all placated. "Well, I will say this much and no more: if angels from heaven bore witness to San Gaetano's guilt, instead of only the young fool himself, I would not credit them! Make what you can of the warning. It was not my wish to let him hang without speaking my mind, though I knew well how much heed you would pay to one whom you rank as you rank me!"

And with that he stalked away, no doubt thinking it wiser to be gone while my unusual patience held.

CONSIDERABLY ruffled by this interview, I proceeded toward my chamber, and had gone but a dozen steps when I stumbled upon Messer Piero Sansevero in conversation with Della Guardia, our host. Unreasonable as it was, I could not help looking on this lieutenant of mine, so free with his suspicions, as the cause of all the trouble, and I would have passed without halting had not Messer Benedetto stepped forward and laid a hand on my arm. The man's fat good-natured face was for once the very epitome of gloom; his eyes were wet.

"Messer Piero here has just been telling me of this sad affair, Sir John," said he mournfully. "Alas, what a misfortune! A young man so gay, so handsome, of such a charm! For my part, though I well know my judgment is of little value, being always influenced by my likings, I say frankly that I believe him innocent. But even if he be guilty——Ah, Sir John, I have a foolishly soft heart. If it lay with me, I fear that even the worst culprits would never hang. Will you not do me a favor? Will you not give me leave to send this unhappy young man the best solace in my power, in the shape of an excellent supper and a few flasks of my oldest wine?"

Though I did not think San Gaetano would pay much heed to these offerings, I gave the required permission, and felt for my host more esteem and less good-natured contempt than I had felt yet. Then I went on, taking no notice of Sansevero, who was standing by as if complacently waiting for my thanks at having so nicely cleared matters up.

What I wanted at present was a little solitude, and when I found young Maurizio Bardi waiting for me on my threshold, with the face of a man who had lost his last friend, I felt that I could bear no more.

"Bardi," said I, "there is no use on earth in your talking to me, for I know all you wish to say. You mean to tell me that you

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know San Gaetano well, that you would stake your soul on his loyalty. You mean to point out that it is ridiculous to believe that a young man of his wealth and rank would betray his country for gold. I am as well aware of this as you are, but I can not see that it does away with his own confession. Afterward, you probably intend to shed tears—I believe you are not far from them now—and to beg me to spare him because you love him, as if that were a reason for pardoning a traitor! Now, answer me honestly. Have you any more than this to say?"

"Yes, Sir John," he answered, much to my surprise, "I have a strange thing to tell you concerning this matter!"

"Then, in the name of Heaven, let me hear it," said I, and led the way within.

Maurizio Bardi waited till I had taken my seat, then came close to me and spoke in a low voice, as if crediting the walls with ears. "Listen, Sir John," he began solemnly. "I have good reason to think that when Messer Piero Sansevero first announced that he entertained suspicions, he was not thinking of San Gaetano at all, and that he was as much surprised as any of us to have my poor Ridolfo proclaim himself the guilty man!"

Here was news indeed.

"And why, pray?" I demanded, expecting, I must confess, no very startling disclosure.

Young Bardi appeared to struggle with himself.

"It is an evil thing to tell," he lamented, "but my friend's life comes before all else! This is what chanced, Sir John. Last night, as you will recall, we held our council of evil memory in the chamber with the red hangings. When it was ended, you went down to the camp, and San Gaetano vanished, I can not say where. But Sansevero and myself sat for a time in the lower hall, conversing. We have little in common, but there was nothing better to do. From our seats we had a good view of the gallery above, on which opens the door of the red-hung chamber. Well, we had been there but a few moments when we saw that door open quietly, and Madonna Lucia, our host's daughter, come out in the fashion of one who wants to avoid notice, steal along the gallery and so vanish. You understand, Sir John? We had not been out of sight of that door since the conference ended—and we saw Madonna Lucia come out, though we had not seen her go in!"

"Do you mean to tell me," I interrupted, startled into speech, "that Madonna Lucia sat in that chamber throughout our council and that we, five men provided by Heaven with two eyes apiece, were entirely unaware of her presence? This affair has turned your brain, Bardi. You are as mad as San Gaetano himself!"

"A moment, Sir John! Hear me explain!" cried poor Bardi, obviously in terror lest I lose patience and send him off with his tale untold. "Do you recall, in that chamber, a deep window-alcove, half hidden by thick curtains? Now did any of us draw those curtains aside and look behind them? To be sure we did not. At that happy time we had not yet begun to occupy ourselves with thoughts of treason. And therefore it is plain that Madonna Lucia might have overheard all our conference from within the alcove, do you not see? I thought nothing of it yesterday—I supposed she had entered later, unperceived by Sansevero and myself. But now, on thought, I see that to have been impossible and so I give you the truth!"

He had certainly provided me with something to consider, and I did consider it, for a long time and in silence.

"You think, then," I asked at last, "that this was the circumstance which Sansevero intended to relate to me?"

Bardi's answer was a vigorous nod. "But then," he added dolefully, "why under heaven should Ridolfo interrupt him and announce his guilt? It is too great a puzzle for me, Sir John. I would give something if Ridolfo and I had never taken the fancy to see fighting, and had remained at Florence, where at least we were never suspected of deeds like this!"

Again I reflected. Undoubtedly Bardi's suspicions might be correct. I recalled those tales that had reached my ears concerning the friendship which Messer Benedetto della Guardia was thought to bear the Pisans. Was it possible that our host was indeed false to Florence, and that his appearance of good-natured stupidity was neither more nor less than a clever mask? Had he set his daughter to spy on us? I recalled Madonna Lucia's clear dark eyes and could scarce believe it. Moreover, if all this were true, how did San Gaetano enter into the affair? Unless indeed the girl had

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persuaded him to join her in some treasonable scheme—a possibility in which, emphatically, I put little trust.

"It appears to me, now that I think of it," I said to Bardi, "that San Gaetano has of late spent a good deal of his time with Madonna Lucia. Is it not so?"

"Ah, yes, Sir John," cried Bardi, "from the day of our coming! He sits with her, talks with her, plays the lute for her amusement. But that is no more than his way with fair ladies, as you know——"

"I have some cause to know it," I commented grimly, and even in his distress Bardi indulged in a sheepish grin at memory of that time when he and his friend began by losing their hearts to a pretty coquette whose brains weighed somewhat less than so much thistle-down, and ended by well-nigh bringing about the death of all three of us.

"There, take yourself off, Maurizio, and leave me to make what I can of this riddle!"

Bardi got as far as the threshold, then halted.

"I may go to Ridolfo and do what I can to cheer him?" he asked ingratiatingly.

"You may not," I answered with an emphasis that made him start. "I do not believe your friend a traitor, but I do hold him some strange new variety of fool, and if he does not pass such a night as will be a lesson to him, it shall be no fault of mine!"

BARDI went off at this, with a face which proclaimed that he thought me the most stony-hearted tyrant on earth, and I spent the remainder of my evening in an effort to form some decision.

So far I had met with small success. Well, I reflected angrily, as I tossed on my couch, here I was in a pretty position. Was there ever such a case before—a lieutenant proclaiming his guilt, a commander trying to persuade him that he was mistaken?

I would be the laughing-stock of all Italy if the tale ever got about, and moreover all my officers would feel quite at liberty to betray me whenever the fancy took them.

Well, let them try it, I thought grimly. They would soon find that not for many men did I have such an absurd weakness as for that young fool above-stairs! Having reached this conclusion and found some small satisfaction in it, I drifted off to sleep

It must have been full two hours later, to judge by the lessened moonlight in the room, when I suddenly started broad awake with the feeling that something was amiss. So strong was the belief that for a moment I lay rigid, holding my breath. The silence was profound and unbroken, and I was about to relax with a noisy sigh when the creak of wood, slight but distinct, reached my ears from across the room. Some one was opening my door, which in my perturbation of mind I had left unbolted!

My first impulse was to spring up, dash forward and seize the intruder, whoever he might be, before he could retire. My second—and they say that second thoughts are best—was to lie perfectly still and await developments. Another creak was wafted to me through the hush of the night. I imagined that the door was by now wide open. Then there was a faint noise within the chamber, and I knew that my unbidden visitor had begun to creep across the floor.

It took some resolution, let me tell you, to remain motionless on my back while that intruder crept nearer and nearer to my bed. Perhaps it was some one who had come to make an end of me. If so, since I could reach neither my sword nor my dagger without noise, I would be taken at an utter disadvantage.

However, I did not believe I was in any such peril. While I make no pretensions to the gift of second sight, it is perfectly true that my mind has a habit of putting two and two together and enlightening me rapidly as to the result. And at present I would have risked a wide slice of my lands on the wager that my visitant had come not to kill me, but for some purpose that had to do with my nightmare day.

Sure as I felt of this, there was enough doubt about it to lend a distinct spice to the situation, and I can recall few tenser moments in my life than those in which the cautious steps halted in the darkness close beside my bed. There was no telling—in another instant I might feel a dagger glide between my ribs. But I had gone too far now to change my tactics, and even when the intruder bent over me with face close against mine, I remained quite motionless, breathing evenly and heavily, as if sleeping the sleep of the righteous.

Considerably to my relief, this did not last long. My invisible friend drew back in the evident conviction that I knew nothing

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of what was passing, and began, with the least possible noise, to glide across the room. Still did I not know who the intruder was. A moment later I caught the faint rustle of parchment on my table.

IT WAS hard for me to play my supine part any longer, for that sound had been an illuminating one to me.

For two days past I had spent all my spare moments at work over a map of the Pisan country, marking on it the advance I planned when once I held the fortress which was the key of the chain. Trusting my officers fully, I had made no secret of my occupation.

It was as clear as day that the person now using my room for a midnight ramble had come to lay fingers on this document. Moreover I needed small intelligence to guess that I was not likely to have two traitors about me, and that in recognizing this guest I might discover the traitor to blame for the first betrayal. But who could it be, then? Not San Gaetano, unless he had neatly and noiselessly poniarded his two guards in the room above.

To rack my brains in this fashion was, however, time lost, since all I need do was to wait. The forces of nature themselves, seeing me at my wit's end, had come to my aid. Since the entrance of this thief a single beam of moonlight had begun to shine through the window and to steal slowly but steadily between the table and the door, so that to take departure the culprit must pass full in its path.

I lay motionless, waiting; and as those light steps quitted the table I confess my heart was heavy. In a moment more I was going to lose forever my trust in some one. Would stupid-looking Della Guardia appear in the bright pathway, and so stand revealed as one of the most cunning masqueraders I had ever known? Might it even be his pretty daughter with the dark frank gaze? Or would it be one of my lieutenants—Brice, whom I had believed so honest, the skilful Sansevero, or young Bardi, whom I had held a light-hearted, courageous boy?

The thief was close to the moonlight now. For one brief instant I looked on a strained, intent face. Then the steps passed on, and a moment later my door creaked shut.

For some time after that I lay reflecting. I had no doubt whatever that the thief would presently return and replace the parchment exactly where it had lain, lest I should suspect in the morning. But I saw no reason why I should remain awake waiting for the event. Instead, when I had compared my new knowledge with the happenings of the past day, I chuckled for the first time in many hours, turned over on my side, and went peacefully to sleep.

III

THE first thing that I did the next morning, after having broken my fast, was to call a council in the chamber of the red hangings. My officers obeyed the summons at once, and were soon gathered around me, a far from hilarious group, as they evidently fancied I was about to announce to them the immediate execution of San Gaetano.

Messer Piero Sansevero, always prompt, was the first to appear, wearing a decorous air of gloom. Bardi, the second arrival, was a figure of despair, and so pale and disheveled that one might have been pardoned for mistaking him for a lunatic. The last to enter was Robert Brice, his temper not a whit improved from its state of the previous night.

"So we are to advise with you again, are we, Sir John? You are putting too much trust in such unworthy rogues! Had you not better hang us all instead?" he growled as he advanced.

And I saw that he would not forgive me for yesterday's occurrence until some little bout with the Pisans should arrive to ease the tension, after which we would resume our former good accord.

I was spared the necessity of answering him by the arrival of San Gaetano, who came in with his arms bound behind him and two guards at his heels. From his strained white air and the disorder of his rich dress, it was plain he had passed a most unhappy night. But one look into his desperately determined eyes assured me that the experience had not had upon him the salutary result for which I had hoped. Moreover, there remained about him a hint of temper rather strange in one confessedly guilty of a shameful crime, for I might almost say he snapped at me as he entered.

"In the name of the saints, Sir John Hawkwood," he cried, "why can you not

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hang me and be done with the matter? By how many more of these interviews do you intend to torture me?"

In a few forcible words I pointed out to him that it was not the general custom of commanders to consider overmuch the finer feelings of men who had betrayed them, upon which Bardi favored me with a glare, and went over and planted himself at his friend's side, putting a consoling arm about him. At this point the door opened to admit the two remaining members of our party. Messer Benedetto della Guardia came in, holding his beautiful daughter by the hand, and trying, with all the scant intelligence he could muster, to nerve her for the ordeal.

"Come, child," he urged encouragingly, "no cause to tremble like this! What Sir John Hawkwood desires of us I have no idea, but I have always found him a most kindly soul at heart despite his alarming appearance, and I do not doubt we shall find the interview a pleasant one enough——"

His flow of speech was cut short in a startling fashion. At sight of San Gaetano standing before her, with bound arms, the girl gave a low heart-rending cry, shrank back and would have fallen, but for her father's aid.

"He's in bonds!" she panted. "He is a prisoner! Do they think, then, that *he* did this treason of which you spoke last night?"

As for San Gaetano, the sight of her seemed to goad him to frenzy.

"It is enough, Sir John! It is too much!" he flung at me, with a high head and a white face. "To die disgraced is sufficient punishment for any man. You have no right to require that Madonna Lucia see me in my shame!"

"Madonna Lucia," said I with curt civility, "I have sent for you to ask you a question. More than once I have been given to understand that your father there is somewhat over-friendly to our Pisan foes——"

"As God hears me, Sir John, it is false!" cried Messer Benedetto, in a startled flurry. "There breathes no better Florentine than I. Only, you comprehend, when no actual war exists, and my neighbors from across the border pause here at my doors, I can scarce bid them begone! Alas, my good nature will be my ruin yet! But I swear by everything holy that I am a true man——"

"And therefore," I continued to his daughter, ignoring the interruption, "you will understand that I am curious to learn how it chances that you were seen to issue from this room yesterday, but a few moments after my council had broken up!"

My answer came not from her, but from San Gaetano. Springing to her side, as if with an impulse of protection, he confronted me furiously.

"It is enough, Sir John!" he cried again, with increased violence. "I have already confessed to the treason! What can you hope to gain by more inquiry?"

Madonna Lucia stared at him for a long instant, and slowly there grew on her lips a very sweet, very beautiful smile.

"I understand. I understand now," she said beneath her breath.

Then she turned to me, looking into my eyes with a gaze no man in his senses could have doubted.

"SIGNORE," she said, "I will gladly give you the simple truth of the matter. Yesterday I sat in the window-alcove yonder, thinking of—of certain things."

For a mere second her eyes veered toward San Gaetano, who was watching her with desperate intentness.

"It was warm, and I was weary. Presently I fell asleep. When I awoke there were voices in the room here. It was plain that a council was in progress, but it seemed about to end, and therefore I remained hidden until all of you had departed—because, you comprehend, I felt shame to appear as a spy when I was no such thing. That is the truth, believe me!" She seemed to forget me utterly as she turned back to San Gaetano. "You saw me come from the chamber, signore? Is it not so?"

My young traitor had all the look of a man suddenly translated from torment to paradise.

"Yes, yes," he cried, as oblivious of the rest of us as she. "I was on the upper staircase and saw you emerge! I believed that you had spied upon us. Lucia, can you grant me pardon?"

"You confessed yourself a traitor for my sake?" Lucia whispered. "You gave your honor for me?"

While still maintaining that San Gaetano had conducted himself like a fool, I can not

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deny that he appeared at that instant like one of a glorified kind.

"I would have given more, a thousand times more, had I had it to give!" the young hothead cried fervently. "Why, and what else could I have done, Lucia, having loved you from the first day that I came to this house?"

Madonna Lucia put her hands on his shoulder and let her head fall upon them, and I, recognizing that a man with bound arms is somewhat at a disadvantage in such a situation, advanced in leisurely fashion and cut the ropes with my dagger.

"What do you say, signori?" I inquired, turning back to my officers. "Do you not think that our friend here has been less guilty than he would have had us believe?"

I AM sorry to say, however, that Sansevero was plainly not in accord with us. "Why, Sir John," he cried with unseemly heat, "can you doubt San Gaetano's guilt when he has himself owned to it?"

"I can, and do, my friend," I answered, regarding him with narrowed eyes. "For in my opinion a confessed traitor is not always a culprit, any more than a man who lies stretched on his bed at midnight is always asleep!"

Sansevero started back from me with a choked exclamation, his olive skin whitening in a fashion not pleasant to look on. For some moments we regarded each other steadily. Then I spoke again.

"You are a very clever rogue indeed, Messer Piero," said I. "You deceived me as far as to win my entire trust, which is more than most folk of your kind can boast. But you should have rested content with your first success, and not have so far tempted fortune as to come seeking parchments in my bedchamber, waking the echoes with your tread! It is evil luck for the Pisans, on my word, for after to-day they will need to win over another of my lieutenants, and I fear they will meet with small satisfaction in such a quest!"

I must admit that Messer Piero Sansevero was not lacking in courage. He forced a smile and saluted me in ceremonious fashion.

"Very good, Sir John Hawkwood. I know as well as another when a game is played," he informed me, with an excellent pretense at indifference. "Yes, I have deceived you prettily. You took me for a Veronese, eh? So I was at the moment when I took service with you, but only because Pisa, my native city, had banished me for life, as penalty for the killing of a certain kinsman whose goods I was desirous to inherit! Through all the time I have been with you I have planned to betray you to Pisa, at price of that inheritance and the right to return home, and in this campaign it was child's play to arrange the bargain."

"It is plain you are too shrewd a knave to be left at large in this gullible world!" said I. "The gallows, believe me, is your proper place. Be good enough to accompany these guards without, and to wait there until I have leisure to arrange a suitable entertainment for you!"

With a salutation and a somewhat fixed smile, Messer Piero left the room and I think we all breathed the freer for his going. The sound of the closing door roused San Gaetano, and apparently had the effect of making him realize, somewhat tardily, that he owed me an explanation, for he left Madonna Lucia with a last radiant smile, hurried forward and, despite my grim look of disapproval, insisted on seizing both my hands.

"You understand, Sir John," he cried imploringly, "I feared for her if you should suspect her guilt, and I could think of no other device than to take the blame on my own shoulders! You will pardon me, for the love which we all know you bear your own lady? Indeed, you would not bear too hardly on me did you know how it wrung my heart to have you think me a traitor, you for whom I would give my life!"

By way of answer to this appeal I turned toward Messer Benedetto della Guardia, who, mute as any fish, had been regarding the whole scene with starting eyes. Poor soul, his brain was scarce of a sort to follow such rapid developments with ease!

"Messer Benedetto," said I impressively, "do you not pity a general doomed to be driven out of his senses by a lieutenant such as this? Unless he enters wedlock and becomes a reasonable human being, he will be the death of me yet!"

Della Guardia seized with relief on something he could understand and, with a voluble nod of his head gave consent to the match.

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LA DOÑA LOLITA

by Charles C. Lofquest

FOR the twentieth time at least that afternoon, Lolita, the housekeeper at the Estancia Rawson, went to the window in the kitchen of the ranch-house. There was an anxious gleam in her black eyes as she gazed out upon the gloomy pampa.

Not a movement of Lolita's long lashes escaped the furtive scrutiny of Carlota, the kitchen-maid, who was seated at a table peeling onions for the savory stew which was boiling in a huge pot on the stove. Smiling a crafty smile, Carlota chuckled to herself. For she was positive she knew the reason for the anxiety of La Doña Lolita, as the *gauchos* called the housekeeper because she was young and pretty and so different from the women one usually meets on the Patagonian pampas.

"Truly, we are nervous this day, my little Lolita," said Carlota. "You are anxious about your lover, Don David, eh, my dear?"

Lolita gave a startled cry, and, turning her head quickly, caught the leer on the scullery-woman's flaccid face.

"How dare you, Carlota!" she exclaimed, her cheeks flaming scarlet.

"Tut! Tut!" Carlota retorted. "You can not deceive me. The young *hombre* loves you, and you—well, you are not angry about it. And why should you be; the Don David will be a rich *estanciero* some day."

"Hold your tongue!" commanded Lolita tremulously.

"But why have you been to the window so often, eh? Is it for Pablo, or Sancho, or Geronimo, or any of the *gauchos* with David? No, señorita, it is for the young *hombre* himself that you look, is it not so?"

"Stop, Carlota, please," begged Lolita.

"You aim high," went on the garrulous kitchen-maid. "The woman who marries Don David will have all her heart can wish for, and a fine, handsome husband to boot. His father is a rich Welshman, but don't forget that old Don Moses is as cross as he is rich. It is of the old *hombre* you must beware. I've heard he has picked a Welsh girl to become his son's bride."

Biting her lip, Lolita lifted her troubled glance to the gray sky. The blood was still hot on her cheeks, and she was wondering how to repress this vulgar familiarity.

"But the men should have been back from San Stefano this morning," she presently remarked, as if in defense of her continued presence at the window. "It will be dark soon, and they are not in sight yet. Señor Rawson has asked a dozen times about them. What can delay them?"

"Perhaps Don David has been robbed by some one who knew he carried back a large sum for the sale of the herd he drove to San Stefano. Perhaps he met that bad robber, the Red Miguel; they say he's been seen lately near the settlement."

As she spoke Carlota watched Lolita closely and saw her start at the mention of the Red Miguel's name.

"S-sh! You must not alarm his father!" whispered Lolita, strangely excited. "He is in his room and may hear you."

Carlota directed a glance through the half open door and caught a glimpse of the *estanciero*, a big shaggy-bearded old man, with the head of a patriarch and the frame of a giant, walking about in his den off the

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sitting - room. The kitchen - maid's sharp knife slashed through an onion as she turned a question in her mind. She was trying to imagine what the choleric Don Moses Rawson would do when she told him what she had heard on a recent visit to the settlement about La Doña Lolita, this young woman who had supplanted her as household-manager at the rich Welshman's ranch, and whom she hated for that all-sufficient reason. The bare thought of it left her breathless.

"But Don David has five *gauchos* with him," said Lolita. "Surely even this man you have named would not dare attack so many."

"Ah, little one, 'tis three days' ride to the Estancia Rawson—there are lonely places where one man could stop fifty. Then do we not know this cut-throat, Miguel Cabello? Santa Maria, defend all men from that rascal!"

The scullery-woman let go her knife and crossed herself.

"Is this Red Miguel so bad? Certainly he can't overcome six men."

"There were eight in the party of engineers he robbed up in Chubut when he killed a man. He was sentenced to twenty years in the prison at Palermo for that. Is he *so* bad? Was there ever so bloodthirsty a robber!"

But the tense look with which Lolita was listening to Carlota gave way to a smile.

"They're coming!" she exclaimed eagerly. "Hurry with the stew, Carlota."

Breaking into a snatch of song, Lolita hastened to a cupboard. Still singing, she commenced to place the dishes for the evening meal, while Carlota arose with a scowl and dumped the onions she had sliced into the pot.

"Lolita!" roared the elder Rawson. "Do you see the men yet?"

"Yes, they have passed the turn in the trail."

" 'Tis high time," growled Don Moses, tramping into the sitting-room to keep a wary eye upon the women so that there might be no delay with supper.

When Lolita had laid the plates she returned to the window. Although it was almost dusk, she could distinguish the tall figure of Don David mounted on his *colorado* and the five others strung out behind him.

AFTER the riders had pulled up near the house she flung a shawl over her shoulders and, taking an empty water-pail, went outside. David Rawson, looking even bigger than he actually was, in his woolen poncho, wide sombrero and big jack-boots, was leading his tired horse to the water-trough when she reached the pump.

"Why, Lolita!" he laughed, leaving his animal to care for itself.

"Your father has been anxious about you," she said as he took the pail.

"And weren't you, too; just a little bit?"

"Yes," she admitted candidly.

David slipped his arm gently about her shoulder.

"What did you think had happened, eh?"

"I thought perhaps you had been robbed—killed."

"Robbed! Killed!" he exclaimed. "How did you get such a gory idea?"

"It was Carlota's fault—she kept talking about the Red Miguel."

"That's strange. Miguel was seen in the settlement the night before we left. Somebody fired a shot at the rascal, but failed to bring him down."

"But what *did* make you so late?" she asked quickly.

"Our horses strayed, at last night's camp, and we had a long search for them."

David felt her trembling and drew her closer to him, but when he tried to kiss her she moved away from him.

"Don't, David," she whispered.

"Why not. Haven't I told you many times I love you? Are we not soon to——"

"Yes, yes," gasped Lolita, "but I'm afraid all this should not be. I am your father's servant and an Argentine, while you—you——"

"While I was born in the republic, too, if you please, and, better still, out on the great pampas," he finished for her.

They were alone outside now, for the *gauchos* had gone to their quarters, whence came the music of a guitar and the sharp rattle of castanets. Behind them showed the thin crescent of the new moon, and here and there, in the vast heavens winked a silvery star. David stood a moment regarding her in the uncertain light. Then he seized her in his powerful arms. This time she made no struggle, not even when he kissed her, but laid her burning cheek

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against his and with a sob clasped her arms tightly about him.

"I suppose you're afraid father will not agree," he said. "But he must give his consent, or I'll marry you without it. I'll have it out with him this very night."

"I fear he will be very angry," she faltered. "I can bring you nothing, and you will some day own many hectares of land."

"Land!" scoffed David. "If necessary I can begin with nothing, just as father did. But you I must have. I'll leave him if he refuses. Will you come away with me?"

"Don't ask me that!" she cried in alarm. "I could never be happy if I separated father and son."

"But you must!" he insisted passionately.

She was on the point of speaking when she realized how long she had been outside.

"Quick, David," she exclaimed, "fill the pail. They'll come if we don't go."

And David followed her into the house, but his jaw was grim with determination.

II

SEÑOR DON MOSES RAWSON went to his den as soon as he had had supper, unceremoniously quitting the table before the others. Here, alone, he spent most of his days, and far into the night the white-bearded man would sit studying his huge Bible. Here, too, so it was whispered among the *gauchos*, Don Moses kept his hoard of gold; for he had for many years had an aversion to banks, since he had lost heavily through the failure of one at San Stefano.

When David entered his father's room to turn over the money realized from the sale of the herd, Don Moses had settled down for the night, but he closed his Bible to count the sum the young man laid down.

"You should not keep your money here in the house," said David, after his father had counted the gold and locked it up in a strong-box.

"What do you mean?" Don Moses fixed his son with his piercing eyes.

"Everybody else keeps money in the banks."

"Banks! Aye, I had my fill of banks, lad."

"Besides it's bad to have it known one keeps money at home."

"Who knows it?"

"Everybody, even the commonest *gauchos*."

The old man frowned at his son, and then abruptly he changed the subject.

"So it were the horses straying as delayed you, eh, Davy?"

"Why, yes," replied David, displeased at the sharp look his father gave him. "You asked that several times at the table, and in a way as if you didn't believe me."

"Well, if you tied the brown mare and put the bells on her, I can't see how them horses run off. You might have tarried at the drink-shop, and blamed the delay to the horses, eh?"

"Do you think I'm lying to you?" David flushed as his temper rose.

"It's queer how them horses run off," insisted Don Moses stubbornly. "As for drinking in them Argentine groggeries, Davy, I hope you'll always remember you're a Welshman."

"I'm sick of being treated as if I were a brat in knee-breeches!" cried David. "I'm a full-grown man and do a man's work; yet you bully me as if I were an unruly boy. I won't stand it no longer, no sir!"

Astonished at this outburst, Don Moses at first could only gasp and clinch and unclinch his big, toil-worn hands. Then he struck the table a blow that nearly upset the lamp.

"Boy, you've been, and boy you are!" he finally roared, rising to his feet and pointing a finger accusingly at David. "But what hurts me worst, lad, is that lately you've been naught but a moon-struck calf, a-hanging to the skirts of this young Argentine woman."

"Father!"

For a full minute father and son stood a few feet apart, glaring at each other like enemies ready to come to blows. Don Moses's lips twitched convulsively, but he did not move when his son took a step toward him.

"Remember, Lolita is in the kitchen and may hear you," David warned him.

"I hope she does!" exclaimed Don Moses. "To-morrow that scheming greaser snake leaves this house—and I hope she hears *that!*"

"Don't, father," came from David's lips in a frantic whisper. "Lolita has promised to become my wife."

At this confession a fiercer gleam leaped into the old man's eyes. The veins at his temples swelled with his passion.

"So it's gone that far, eh," he snapped

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between his teeth. "But do you think this Argentine minx 'll have you if I cut you off in my will? Do you think that—you as could have the best Welsh girl in the territory without tagging after a greaser?"

"Stop!" shouted David, unable to restrain himself. "You sha'n't insult the woman I love, to my face. Keep your land. Lolita and I will leave and begin empty-handed."

Proudly Don Moses lifted his leonine head, but soon the fire that flashed in his eyes died, and he sank down in his chair.

"Why, Davy," he muttered, in haggard wonderment, "would you leave your father for this girl?"

"Not unless you force me to." David looked away as he answered.

The old man sat nodding his head, his fingers fumbling in his beard, anon casting up an amazed glance, as if to make sure that this bronzed, determined-looking man who confronted him was really his son. For, under all his adamantine crust of surliness, Don Moses had a deep filial love.

"Marry her, and I'll chop you off without a peso!" he suddenly exclaimed, flying into a new rage. "Marry her, and out of my house and home, out of my sight and mind, you go forever. I won't have my name dragged in the mire by you marrying into a family of thieves and murderers."

"You brought Lolita here yourself," retorted David, "and I never heard you say that of her before."

"I didn't know it myself until a while ago when Carlota told me."

"What in Heaven's name has Carlota told you?"

"That Lolita is the sister of the robber, jail-breaker and murderer, the Red Miguel!"

Don Moses struck the table at each word.

"A sister of the Red Miguel!" repeated the astonished David. "Impossible! Carlota has trumped up that story. Where did she get her information?"

"She heard it in San Stefano, and told me about it when Lolita went out to meet you. She has been waiting for some time to tell me."

"I'll wager she has!" said David scornfully.

"Well, I believe Carlota heard the truth, and I won't have no sister of the Red Miguel under my roof and a-breaking my bread. Like as not she's been plotting with her thief of a brother to rob me when the time was ripe."

Having thus spoken his mind, Don Moses opened his Bible, apparently to indicate that the interview was over, but when his son commenced to protest he snapped the book shut and jumped to his feet. Now his wrinkled face was livid with rage.

"I'll listen to no more love-twaddle!" he exclaimed, shaking his fist. "There's the door. To-morrow Lolita leaves this *estancia*. If you want to tag after her, go and take my curse with you; but don't ever come back sniveling for forgiveness."

"I have made my choice," gulped David, turning his back on his father and leaving the room.

Calmly Don Moses opened his Bible and resumed his reading, not a line of his severe face betraying the violent agitation that was rending his soul.

In the kitchen, where a lamp glowed feebly, David found Lolita huddled in a chair. Her face was tearless, but her whole body was trembling.

"Poor girl!" he comforted her.

"It is terrible," she wept, her voice barely audible. "I could not help hearing him. Oh, David——!"

"There! There!" he said. "You know how father is when he is angry," David stopped when he saw that she had ceased crying. "But by Heavens," he exclaimed, "I'm through with him. Will you let me go with you to-morrow?"

She looked up quickly at him, brushing her hair from her eyes.

"But you haven't asked me whether I am a sister of the Red Miguel?"

"I don't care whose sister you are. It is you I love. Will you go with me?"

"Do not ask me for an answer now," she implored him. "I—I am too dazed—stunned. Leave me alone to solve this problem. Your presence would only make me afraid to decide."

"Very well, Lolita," he said, "give me your answer in the morning."

"Yes, David, in the morning you will get your answer—you will know."

ONLY one thought had filled Lolita's mind while she was talking with David—the same thought had rushed into her anguished brain when she

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heard Don Moses vituperate her. Now that David had left her alone she saw clearly that it was the only solution.

Only by flight, alone and unseen, could she escape brutal humiliation. This, too, would be her answer to David; her very absence would speak her message of despair. For some moments she sat wondering how David would take it; then she saw that it would be harder for her. Yes, she knew that she loved David, but she also felt that her love would only harm him. After all, it was best that he should forget her.

Once Lolita had made her decision she was not slow to act. Stepping softly into her room, she had soon wrapped together her few belongings. From a cupboard she took several loaves of bread, some meat, sugar and tea to keep herself alive on the long ride to the coast. As she quickly finished her preparations she decided to pick a horse out of the herd that always grazed near the house.

It was only when she stepped out into the engulfing darkness that a pang of fear and hesitation shot through her. But she gritted her teeth and started away from the house. The wind stung her face and only by some effort did she fight her way against it. Soon she stopped to rest, looking back on the place she was leaving forever. The house seemed small and insignificant as it crouched flat under the multitude of stars.

Lolita was stooping to pick up her bundles when she heard a quick footstep behind her. The next instant she screamed shrilly, her heart beat wildly, as she felt herself seized roughly by the shoulder. Exerting all her strength, she tried to tear herself free, but a strong hand tightened its grip on her, jerking her around to face a tall, poncho-garbed figure. Then the icy blade of a dagger was thrust against her throat.

"Who are you, señor?" she managed to utter. "Do you belong on the *estancia?* Take your knife away; it is only Lolita."

But the knife still was pressed against her throat.

"Ah, Lolita, 'tis you!" exclaimed the man, sinking his fingers still deeper into her flesh. "Another squeak like the last you let loose, and I'll rip you from ear to ear."

Lolita almost collapsed as she recognized the familiar voice.

"Miguel," she gasped panic-stricken.

"Yes, my sister, 'tis Miguel. Are you glad to meet your loving brother?"

"Why come you here?" she asked swiftly. "What means this?"

"That I have affairs with you, pretty one."

She could see that Miguel's clothes were old and torn, and that below the eyes that shone under his sombrero brim there was a handkerchief tied, concealing most of his face.

"But what business have you with me?" she demanded.

"Here, here!" he rebuked her. "I'm in no humor to be barked at. They're crowding me, Lolita—making it too hot for me. I must get out of this country."

Because of the wind she caught only a part of what he said. She begged him to release her, and when he did she sank down exhausted. Miguel squatted on the ground, drawing close to her side.

"Alas, I thought I had seen the last of you, sweet sister," he said. "Fancy my surprise when I heard you were working for Señor Rawson, the rich old miser! Here you are living like a queen, while I am an outcast at whom any man has the right to shoot on sight." He nudged her and lowered his voice. "And I hear it gossiped that you and the old miser's son, Don David, are thicker than thieves. Truly, 'tis a queer world, eh sister?"

"Why have you come here?" she asked him again.

The Red Miguel scratched a match on his boot heel to light the cigarette he had been rolling as he spoke. In breathless horror Lolita stared at the lean, evil face, with its hollow cheeks and restless eyes, which the feeble flame of the match illuminated for an instant.

"You are going to help me get the money I need to leave this country," he said.

"Help you!" she repeated in amazement.

"Even so, beauteous one! I wish to part Señor Moses Rawson from his treasure. With you who know the place to guide me, it should be child's play, think you not so?"

"You mean to rob Señor Rawson?" she asked.

"Exactly—to-night. And a right plump old goose to pluck Don Moses should be. He's been storing his money for years, and I know his son brought back another pile

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to-night. For I was in San Stefano when he sold a big herd of horses. I trailed him and his men, planning to steal upon them. Last night I crawled into their camp and scared away their horses, thinking the men would separate in searching for the horses and thus give me my chance to catch the young *hombre* alone. Then I suddenly remembered you were out at the Estancia Rawson. In a flash I saw I could bag Don Moses's whole treasure by waiting until his son got home, and then getting you to help me."

"So I'm to turn thief, eh?"

"No, you are merely to go back to the house, and when everything is ready light a lamp and raise it three times up and down in a window as a signal to me. Then open the door for me, and leave the rest to your devoted brother, understand?"

"But if you are caught?"

"Ah, it would not be healthy for the one who catches me!"

Lolita trembled at the answer Miguel gave her, for her mind had reverted to David.

"Suppose I do not wish to do this that you demand?" she questioned.

"Think you I have come all this way to be refused, eh?" he answered fiercely. "I'll get Don Moses's money to-night, if I have to kill you to get it!"

She recoiled in terror at his threat, but he jerked her back to his side. As she sat, shivering and defenceless, her mind was seeking some loophole of escape. Miguel must not rob Don Moses; he might clash with David—might kill David! She had to prevent the robbery at whatever risk she herself had to take.

"Come now!" said Miguel. "Will you help me pluck the rich old goose?"

Lolita held her breath a moment before answering him.

"If you will go away, Miguel," she finally replied, "and never annoy me again, I'll help you so that you may get out of the Argentine. But swear—swear that you'll leave the country forever."

The oath that Miguel swore made her shut her eyes and shudder.

"'Tis a bargain, dove!" he declared. "Clasp hands upon it; but beware you do not play me false—beware of that!"

She laid her hand in his, but hardly felt the squeeze he gave it, so far away were her thoughts.

In rapid sentences the Red Miguel outlined his plans. It really required little of her. She had only to signal with the lamp; open the door for him and indicate in which room and where the money was kept. After he had finished and Lolita arose to go she first remembered her bundles, and picked them up.

"What have you there?" asked Miguel suspiciously.

"Only some—some washing for Carlota to do," she answered confusedly.

"Well, hurry on, sweetest, and don't forget the signal!" he said, evidently satisfied with her answer.

III

IT WAS very still in the dark house when Lolita stepped into the kitchen. Noiselessly she closed the door, turning the key in the lock. On a shelf a clock ticked briskly, and Lolita could see the spectral eyes of Tomás, the ranch cat, blazing out at her from under the stove. On tiptoes she stepped to where a lamp was always kept and lighted it, moving the wick down until it shed only a speck of a light.

Then, lamp in hand, she stepped to a door and looked into the deserted sitting-room. Her heart beat furiously while she listened for the labored breathing of the house's occupants, to make sure they were all asleep in their bedrooms up-stairs. Evidently everybody was fast asleep, even Don Moses, who was always the last to retire to his room above; for Lolita noticed that the door to his den was slightly ajar, as he always left it when he went up to bed. Satisfied with her inspection, she stepped into the sitting-room, and on a table found David's cartridge-belt and revolvers. She pulled the revolvers out of their holsters, made sure that they were loaded and then took them with her when she tiptoed out into the kitchen again.

Despite her careful inspection, however, not a movement made by Lolita since she had lighted the lamp had escaped the observation of one wide-awake member of the sleeping household. Through the crack made by the opened door of his den, old Don Moses was watching her with a keen intentness. The rancher had nodded to sleep over his Bible and slept until he awakened with a start and found his lamp

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burned out. As he was on the point of arising he distinctly heard the kitchen-door open and some one enter. Immediately he shrank back into the darkness of his room; his eye pressed against the crack in the door so that he could see without being seen.

Don Moses clenched his teeth when the wide-eyed Lolita stepped into the sitting-room. Her frightened look instantly told him something was wrong. When she took David's revolvers he reached for his own weapon, which he always kept loaded in his room. Fully convinced that Lolita was plotting an attack on the sleeping household, he raised his own pistol, deciding to shoot her dead where she stood before she could open fire on any one. But as he was pointing his revolver through the crack, and was squinting at the sights for a bead on Lolita's head, she turned. Don Moses lowered his weapon and watched her go back into the kitchen.

Thoroughly mystified, the old Welshman saw Lolita sit down at a table. She took something out of her pocket which she tied into a handkerchief and placed at the other end of the table. Finally she arose and walked toward the door and unlocked it. Having done this, she came back to the table, turned up the light a little, and, to the utter astonishment of the vigilant Don Moses, raised the lamp up and down three times in front of the window. Quickly then she seated herself, seized a revolver in each hand and concealed her hands under her cloak.

Very soon there was a sound at the door, and it was slowly pushed open far enough for the half masked face of the Red Miguel to peer in.

"Come," spoke up Lolita.

Cautiously Miguel stepped in, treading first on one foot, then the other.

"Close the door," she said.

As he turned to shut the door Lolita pulled out the revolvers, and when Miguel again faced her she was pointing both weapons at him. He lurched back, and with an oath his hand went to his knife.

"Stop that!" she warned him. "You are to sit in that chair. If you try to pull your knife, I will certainly shoot you. The shoe is on the other foot now; it is I who command, and you who must obey."

"Tricked—by my sister!" he hissed.

"Sit down—quick!"

Muttering a curse, Miguel took the chair which she had previously placed for him where she could watch every move he made.

"You don't realize what it has cost me to be known as the sister of the Red Miguel," she began, so distinctly that Don Moses, with every sense alert, could hear her. "You don't know I lost my place in Gallegos as soon as Señor Herrara discovered my relationship to you. It was the same in San Stefano and other places. These people didn't stop to find out that my mother and father were not your mother and father; they just dismissed me."

"I've always told people you were only my stepsister," he snarled.

"You are to listen!" She raised the pistols and quickly silenced him. "To escape your evil repute I came out here. But your influence has followed me. And now you come to rob Señor Rawson, demand I help you, threaten to kill me if I don't.

"But you didn't know I was to be driven from this door, too, Miguel. You don't know Señor Rawson this night refused to allow his son to marry me because he thinks I am a sister to the Red Miguel. You don't know that Don David begged me to run away with him, and that when you met me out there I was fleeing from here, so that Señor Rawson would not have to feel disgraced because his only son had run off with a girl he thinks is sister to the Red Miguel. Can't you understand I, too, have become an outcast—must fly the country?"

Her eyes had filled with tears, but the way she clutched the revolvers held Miguel in awe.

"Let us get old Rawson's gold and go together," he tempted her. "Say the word, sweet one, and I'll cut the miser's throat. 'Twould be a revenge!"

"No, Miguel," she resumed, "I have taken a vow you shall not touch one peso in this house. If you try to I'll fire every bullet in these pistols into your miserable body. But if you will agree to go away I'll give you what money I have. It is tied in that handkerchief; there is enough to take you to Brazil. If you take it—you can go your way. If you don't—I'll scream for the men, and you may get a chance to serve out your twenty years at Palermo. Which shall it be?"

Under half-drawn lids Miguel was regarding Lolita with a dreadful look of hatred, estimating the risks that lay between

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him and the gold hidden somewhere in the house. If she would only for a moment relax her watchfulness, he felt confident he could have her by the throat before she fired a shot.

Arising, as if to take the money she had left on the table, Miguel instantly whirled, and as quick as a tiger sprang at her, striking her a crushing blow on the head with his clenched fist. Lolita, caught momentarily off her guard, fell with a groan to the floor. Stooping, Miguel was trying to pull the revolvers out of the senseless woman's hands when there was the sharp report of a shot. A streak of fire flashed through the dark sitting-room and, at the same moment, Miguel felt a bullet tear through his right shoulder and the warm blood spurt down his chest. Before he could snatch one of the weapons out of Lolita's hands, a big white-bearded man, with a smoking pistol in his hand, burst into the kitchen.

IT WAS Don Moses—who with keen ear and eye had been following the drama staged in the ranch-kitchen—with whom Miguel now had to cope. By a lightning blow Miguel succeeded in striking the revolver out of the Welshman's hand just as he pulled the trigger. The bullet crashed through the ceiling. But Don Moses caught the wounded robber about the neck, hugged him to him and, with a twist of his foot, flung him flat on the floor.

Snarling and biting like a dog, Miguel pulled one of his hands free and fumbled for his knife. Soon his fingers closed over its hilt. If he could only slash this powerful man whose muscles bulged like whip-cords, mark him for life, Miguel would be satisfied to die, or to go to Palermo, which was worse. But Don Moses, pressing Miguel down with one knee on his chest, seized the robber's wrist in a vise-like grip, wrenched the knife out of his hand and flung it to one side. Then, as Miguel tried to squirm away, the old Welshman drew back his hairy fist and struck him blow after blow on the head.

"You will cut old Rawson's throat, eh?" he shouted. "You will kill this poor girl for defending me and mine, eh?"

As the infuriated Don Moses pommeled the limp and unconscious Miguel, David, who had been aroused by the pistol-shots, rushed into the room. He sprang to his father's side and pulled him away from the inert man under him.

"Father! Father!" cried David. "What has happened?"

"Let go of me—I'll kill him!" yelled Don Moses, in the fury of his passion, struggling to break away from his son.

"What does this shooting and fighting mean?" asked David excitedly, staring through the powder-smoke at the bleeding man stretched out on the floor.

Abruptly the old man's anger calmed and he glanced hurriedly at Lolita who lay a few feet away. In alarm he raised her head, looking into her face, but was reassured when he saw she was breathing. Picking up Miguel's sombrero, he commenced to fan Lolita with it.

"The Red Miguel tried to rob your father, that's what happened," panted Don Moses, "and this poor girl as I was abusing, for which the Lord forgive me, wouldn't let him. I saw and heard the whole thing through the door of my room. When he pounced on her and struck her I shot him, and then we clinched."

Kneeling at his father's side, David took Lolita's head from his arms when the older man went for a basin of water to wash the trickle of blood from her face. Both father and son watched her tremble when the water was applied to her face. Slowly she opened her eyes, and feebly glanced up at David.

"It's all right, Lolita!" he soothed her.

A smile broke over her face, and there was a faint touch of color on her cheeks when she recognized the man in whose arms she was resting. With a sigh she closed her eyes again.

Don Moses moved closer to David, his stern face working with an overmastering emotion, his eyes dimmed with tears. The big hand that he was reaching out still trembled from his recent excitement.

"Davy, lad," he faltered huskily, "your father has been a blundering old man—too set in his mind. I was wrong, dead wrong, Davy, about this girl. Can you ever forgive——"

David grasped his father's hand, and the squeeze he gave it conveyed his reply better than words could have done.

"I've treated you too much like a boy, Davy," went on the old man, tears stealing down his cheeks. "But that's been

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because I remember you best as the little violet-eyed chap I used to toss in the air. It's hard for me to realize you've grown up to where you—you want to marry. But Lolita has opened my eyes to the wrong I've done. And—and if you want her, Davy, why take her—with my blessing. But now you better carry Lolita to her room, and you, Pablo——" Don Moses turned to several *gauchos* who came in from outside—"ride at once to the Estancia Anilla after the doctor. With a little patching from the *medico*, we ought to be able to ship the Red Miguel to Palermo in a couple of weeks. And then he won't bother Lolita for the next twenty years, by which time let us hope he will have mended his evil ways!"

FERGUSON ADVENTURES

By Herbert C. Test

"'STAND up, you big boob,' I says——" Albert Bates halted at a critical point in his stirring narrative of personal prowess. The interruption was caused by the smiling entrance of Jimmy Buck, who whistled cheerily as he took his seat at the long table and flicked his napkin from its pewter ring with a deft motion which caused the white square to settle gently over the glories of his magenta waistcoat.

"Fighting again Batesy?" he queried. "Remember the six-round limit goes, and be careful where you splash the gore. This table-cloth has to last until Saturday. The Giants, eight to six," he announced, generally, as though in answer to telepathic inquiries from the other boarders.

" 'Stand up and take your medicine,' I told him," Albert Bates resumed his tale. "I led with my left to the stomach——"

Jimmie Buck again interrupted:

" 'He doubled up like a jack-knife,' " he droned in imitation. " 'His head came down just right for a clean wallop to the jaw.' Say Batesy, you ought to change your style. Some of these days them coal-heavers will get on to your ring-generalship and kick you in the slats when you lean over to hand 'em that pet finisher of yours."

A titter rounded the table but Albert Bates appeared pained. "Look a' here, Jimmy——" he began.

"Oh, that's all right." Jimmy Buck was unruffled. "Wait till after dinner and you can go out and lick that victim of yours all over the back yard. If he comes back at you out there, you can pull up a brick and soak 'im to sleep."

He assumed charge of the conversation.

"I think I'll give up baseball and go in for golf," he stated with conviction. "The

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game's going on the bum. The lights went out twice on the *Herald* score-board this afternoon. Somebody stepped on the wire just as Wagner went to bat in the seventh and my box score is short two outs in the eighth. I'll have to get 'em out of the *Journal* in the morning. I'll bet Matty struck 'em out," he concluded hopefully. "Batesy, you've got your fighting-face on; wrestle the butter down this way."

Albert Bates grimly ignored both the speaker and his request. Mary Yourinson, the waitress, secured the tiny remaining pat of butter and rounded up its rough edges with her thumb-nail as she passed along the length of the table to place the plate in front of Jimmy Buck, whom she admired.

She waited a moment for Jimmy to chuck her under the chin—his usual form of gratuity—but the young man was busily engaged for the moment in highly technical deduction as to exact causes of the dangerous batting-rally of the visitors, and she passed on out to the kitchen from whence, almost immediately, came the crash of a fallen plate.

" 'So long Mary,' " Jimmy Buck quoted. "There's another job for me to-night. Have to stay home and kiss our sloppy friend good-by when the old lady counts the crockery."

Albert Bates undertook a verbal sortie.

"For the love of Mike shut up!" he demanded. "Did anybody ever put you on to the danger of hot air crackin' the enamel on your front teeth?" he queried rancorously.

FERGUSON rose from his seat at the head of the board. He scraped his chair loudly as he pushed it back under the table with the instinct of long boarding habit. As occupant of the second floor front who settled promptly each week, he had rights which, he considered, included the privilege of showing his distaste for the line of dinner pleasantries indulged in by Jimmy Buck. Therefore Ferguson left the room, frowning deeply.

Jimmy Buck, already a veteran of the regular evening battle of wits and tongue because of his plucky habit of throwing himself into every conversational breach, noticed the ominous lull in table-talk while Ferguson passed into the hallway leading up-stairs.

"What's the matter with Fergy?" he appealed.

"It's your lip," returned Albert Bates, not ill-pleased. "If you'd spent some of the two weeks you been here finding out who was star-boarder instead of stoking up that human gas-house of yours, you'd kept your mouth shut for maybe five minutes a day. I been trying to give you a tip that he don't like your chin-music. Now Ferguson's sore, and there won't be a chance at a chicken-breast for any of the rest of us till he gets over his grouch. The old lady would sooner lose her false bangs than lose Ferguson—he pays his board," he added significantly.

The matter became subject for general comment.

"Mr. Ferguson *does* seem peeved, don't you think, Mr. Beaston?" Miss Adwilda Barker addressed her right-hand neighbor.

Mr. Beaston was firm.

"It's no wonder anybody's peeved at the bunch of wind-jammers around this dump," was his opinion.

Ferguson mounted to his room and dropped into his Morris-chair in front of the window. He glared out into the street moodily and took no notice of the semaphoric greeting expressed by the waving arm of old man Bottomley from next door, on his carpet-slippered way to the corner with a kettle.

Life had dealt Ferguson a blow. Before the arrival of Jimmy Buck, Ferguson believed that gentle thrumming on the back of a nickeled serving-tray—official dinner-signal at Mrs. Annie Peddy's boarding-house—called together each evening the greatest gathering of adventurers in the world. Ferguson assumed instinctively that he had been thrown in daily intercourse with company of heroic mold.

Although the idea had never taken such definite shape in his trustful mind, it is doubtful if Ferguson would seriously have considered giving up his place as honored listener at Mrs. Peddy's dinner-table for any less station in company with Napoleon, Jack Johnson, Sir Galahad, Dewey, John Drew, Joan of Arc, Charles F. Murphy, Peter the Great, or any other assorted collection of heroes of fact or fiction, even if such an all-the-world list could have been gathered in one spot. Ferguson loved adventure.

Now without realizing the fact he pondered the wreck of his beliefs on the reefs

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of doubt built up by the active tongue of Jimmy Buck. He remembered distinctly the arrival of that embryo cynic two weeks back. Jimmy had gone through his first Peddy dinner without entering the conversation, but Ferguson recollected the very apparent gleam in Jimmy Buck's eyes as those penetrative members searched out each boarder-narrator in turn.

Jimmy Buck's verbal activities began during his second evening meal at Mrs. Peddy's. Jack Beaston was the victim. Ferguson remembered the incident.

Beaston had been in the dramatic center of a vivid tale of personal heroism in which he had just rescued a fair maid from the breakers at Coney. He paused effectively to give thrill to the supposed flight of time while he was battling through the surf with his unconscious burden. During the time, he fingered an ornate medal of the Volunteer Life-Saving Society, which his fellow boarders had been led to believe had been pinned to his lapel as fitting recognition of a similar exploit some time before. Jimmy Buck grabbed the opportunity.

"Say, Cap Clark, how long have you had that reward of merit thing hung on your manly bosom?" he demanded.

Jack Beaston was annoyed but tolerant. "About two weeks, young man," he replied. "Please don't interrupt, and some time I'll tell you about——"

"Oh, never mind," Jimmy Buck admonished. "I just wondered where it had gone. It's been in Bernstein's hock-shop window for a year. I was going to buy it myself one time. Had a skirt over in Brooklyn who was dippy on that life-saving business. It's got P. S. J. on the back. Bernstein's Ikey got the devil from his old man for giving up a dollar on it."

Ferguson remembered Miss Adwilda Barker's gasp of horror and Jack Beaston's failure to complete the details of his heroic deed.

Ferguson recalled how other adventurous idols of Mrs. Peddy's had since been tumbled from their pedestals.

E. MacFarland Smith, who referred to his room and closet on the floor above Ferguson as his "suite," and his job in the sporting-department of Tracy's as his "position," went down under continued assault from Jimmy Buck's vocal batteries after that seeker for truth had discovered that Smith's golf-bag was a glorified lunch-receptacle. The surrender left a résumé of social triumphs forever unfinished.

Jimmy Buck scanned William Tubbs, who affected a sombrero and a "gun," attended business-college in the evening, hailed from Massillon, Ohio and told gory tales of personal adventure with a Wild West flavor. Jimmy then dubbed him "Dynamite," insisted on showing extremely burlesqued fear in his presence and craftily informed members of a neighboring corner-gang that Tubbs went armed and had boasted murderous intentions in reprisal for sundry facetious remarks concerning his hat.

As a consequence, Tubbs was set upon and relieved of his beloved weapon and kicked most of the way to Mrs. Peddy's door.

Jimmy Buck had also taken the trouble to locate the studio in which Delancey Brown, who affected art, laid the plots of a number of spicy adventures. He broke in on a Delancey Brown narrative which had a vivacious model as an important set-piece.

"I followed Browny down to his stu-dee-oo yesterday," he said. "It's a hole-in-the-wall over a Chink laundry, where they collect ten-cent life-insurance. The model I saw coming out of there must have set for a picture of a wash-lady with a bun."

He gleefully pilloried little Tommy Polk, a new arrival, when Tommy came home with a lively tale of personal prominence at a Broadway blaze. Tommy Polk described with great minuteness of detail his impressions of the excitement as viewed from inside the fire-lines, where he claimed to have hobnobbed with veteran reporters, whom he called by their first names. Jimmy awaited impatiently the end of the recounting, his eyes flashing.

"So you're one of them fire-fiends, eh?" he shot out in query. "Well, you might as well can your stock of yarns in that line around here before you get to the hero-stage and come home with a dream of having saved any women and children. I'll bet you never was inside the fire-lines any longer than it took a cop to run you out."

Ferguson remembered that Tommy Polk blushed and gulped and left the table without defending his honor as a faithful recounter of his own deeds and wondered. His meditations were interrupted by a knock on his door.

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"IT'S me, Ferguson. My cigarette's coming in and I'm right behind it," Jimmy Buck hailed and entered. "Want a smoke? No? All right, old scout. I've got eight thousand coupons now and I guess I can go it alone to smoke up the other two thousand for my safety-razor."

Ferguson failed to offer any greeting, but Jimmy Buck did not appear to notice the omission.

"Some classy bunk," he stated casually, as he rolled on the edge of the bed and blew a cloud of smoke at the ceiling. "My mattress feels as though it was refilled at a junk-shop."

There was a period of silence and then Jimmy Buck sat up.

"Say, Ferguson, you must be sore," he offered gently. "That bunch of White Hopes down-stairs there have doped out that it was me put the catsup in your nut-sundae. I didn't know that outfit of elderberries was friends of yours or I wouldn't have kidded them."

Ferguson attempted to retain the dignity of his boarding-house position.

"They're not particularly friends of mine——"

He got no farther.

"Look a' here Ferguson," Jimmy interrupted. "I know. Those Little Rollos down below have been hamstringing you with their pipe-dreams, and they've got you where you're sure they are the whole cheese and half the toast. You never believed that string of dope, did you?"

Ferguson attempted feeble protest.

"I can't say——" he began.

Jimmy Buck again interrupted.

"Well, you did," he spoke with finality. "You've been swallowing the fiction them Arabian Nighters turned loose until they just watch your face and believe themselves. When I broke in here I expected to have to wait around a week before I nailed 'em just right; instead of that I had their score down and totted up before I found out what was in the first hash. I hate boarding-house liars," he finished pensively.

There was another lapse in conversation. Ferguson took a covert glance at Jimmy Buck and found that young man studying him intently.

Jimmy resumed.

"I guess I know what ails you." He spoke with the gravity of the real diagnostician. "You *want* to believe them. You come from some Squeedunk-off-the-Railroad, and you think you are listening to real New Yorkers instead of the pennant-winners in the Ananias League. Why, I had my eye on you the other night when that cute little dame was here with Miss Barker to dinner. She's a neat little skirt all right; got a job dodgin' work in a real-estate office down in our building and all that. But pshaw, she's only a skirt after all. To listen to our symphony orchestra of lyric liars that night you might have thought she was the Queen of Sheba and there was a chance of her givin' some handsome gentleman a pigeon-blood sunburst off her crown." He studied as though weighing his next words.

"And you wanted to get in it too," he stated accusingly. "You set there and heard that crowd kill off everything from bartenders to Indians all over Manhattan and out as far as Newark, just to impress Little Bright Eyes. When you told her it was a nice day you wanted to break in with a little crime or a fake rescue, but you can't lie for sour apples. I'm glad you didn't," he continued gravely. "She was on all right. You made a hit with Little Bonnie. She told me so," he concluded, apparently failing to notice Ferguson's blush of pleasure.

He again gave himself up to study. Then he spoke, thoughtfully.

"Say Ferguson, you're stuck on these big-city adventures. Why don't you go on a little Broadway bat yourself?" He appeared to speculate. "Never lived in any other hash-house in New York, did you?" He took the affirmative nod for granted without looking. "They're all the same. Chicken on Sunday and full of ten-dollar-a-week millionaire-kids." He rose and stood over Ferguson.

"Get me on this," he ordered. "There's nothing in town that looks like the yarns your friends spiel off. Just plain hash-tales. I've got a nose for trouble and I never got a chance to kill a man or save a dame—the coppers are paid for both jobs, and they tend to it. Let me set the switch for you. Just you rob the old sock for a few bucks and start out some night. Don't board a go-see wagon, don't let anybody show you the Bowery and don't stack up against yok or chop suey—they're both worse than our grub. Just paddle along Broadway where our pet prevaricators say they have their adventures. You won't

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see any of them—they ain't got money to buy a mixed drink at a decent bar, even if they knew how to order it—and you will get wise that the burg is safe as a church. If you get in bad while you're tending to your own business or get trimmed, I'll hand over my pay-envelope for a month, and let you pan me before the boarders—or give me a dose of violent poison. Think it over, old man," he finished as he departed.

II

FERGUSON slept lightly that night and awoke early from a dream in which he was trying to save Miss Bonnie Kennedy from death under a fire-engine, hampered by the fact that her arms and head persisted in coming off when he endeavored to drag her to safety by a grip on those important members. His unwonted preoccupation in the office drew attention. His usually busy pen seemed to raise itself from the big ledger and remain poised while Ferguson reached mental decision to seek adventure and forever vindicate or refute the expressed judgment of Jimmy Buck regarding the city.

"Fergy's got the pip," commented the office-boy to the junior partner, with whom he was on terms of intimacy.

Ferguson believed that his soul-struggle ended just before the luncheon-hour. He hurried to his bank. Never having drawn from his reserve-hoard, and therefore dealing only with the receiving-teller, he was forced to secure the identifying aid of that official when he presented his check for a hundred dollars to the cashier.

"Going to beat up the town?" the cashier queried genially when Ferguson declared in favor of twenties. Ferguson felt a touch of pride and tasted advance joys of his proposed entry into the lists of the adventurers.

That night at dinner Ferguson took on a new dignity and was rather bored by blood-curdling details of several narratives exploited by boarders, freed for a time from the embarrassing presence of Jimmy Buck, who was late.

Ferguson also felt relief in the absence of Jimmy Buck. With the approach of night, his resolution to seek adventure weakened. He remembered a number of minor duties needing attention and made up his mind to expend more mature thought on the matter of accepting the advice of his new mentor before he announced his decision to that young man. He rather hurried his meal and decided to forego his dessert and immure himself in his room before Jimmy Buck arrived. He was on his way just in time to meet Jimmy in the hall.

Ferguson attempted to dissemble.

"Hello Buck," he greeted, forcing a smile. "Drop in to-night—I'll probably be in all evening."

Jimmy Buck stopped, halting Ferguson under the hall light. Ferguson felt the power of the gimlet eyes and knew that he had parted with his secret. Jimmy Buck looked at Ferguson critically.

"Don't shave yourself," he instructed. "Slip down to the barber-shop and get a massage and have them trim up what's left of your hair. Go to Nick in the third chair and tell him I sent you to be dolled up for a *chalei*. I'll be right up as soon as I get my dinner."

When Ferguson returned, Jimmy Buck was overhauling his stock of clothes.

"You'd look all right in a 'Tux,'" declared that arbiter of dress after he had inspected the work of the barber, "but the moths have got yours, even if it wasn't too short to cover your half-pint holders. I guess you better wear this blue one. I think I'll slip you a pair of silk socks, and I guess I've got a red necktie that won't blister your chest. I wish I'd told you to get a couple of new collars," he finished, his sartorial exploration having reached a bureau-drawer. He continued his instructions as he assumed the duties of valet to his charge.

"Sneak out and, above all, don't let any of those Hall-room Boys in the house limp along with you. They're likely to try it. I'll be on hand with a piece of gas-pipe if they stick beyond the beer-saloon on the corner. Now remember, you're going to the mat with Old Man Cut-up. Don't get scared and don't be tight-chested. Stick to your own sort of booze, even if it's beer—nobody cares. Don't think every gink you meet is a long lost brother, but go along with anybody you pick up that's got the price of the drinks and that don't try to shake hands. Forget that you're a little bald-headed squirt that could hide behind a peanut and brace up. You got a right to spend whatever you got in your jeans and after you get a few drinks in you'll forget that you've got to go back to a job to-morrow."

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He surveyed the rehabilitated Ferguson keenly and appeared satisfied.

"Well, you won't take any prizes, but you don't look so bad," he gave in judgment.

FERGUSON was nervous and hoped he was to be allowed to start alone. Jimmy Buck decided differently, and left the house with him.

"I guess I'll waddle along part way," he said. "If I'd been sure you was going through the rapids to-night I'd have fixed it to trail, but we just got a new typewriter prima donna started to learn to spell at the boss's expense down at the office to-day. I had to grab her off right away to keep off a red-headed mutt with an ingrowing gall that works in the brains-department. I got a couple of slows for the Hippodrome."

The two had walked a block from Mrs. Peddy's, when Jimmy uttered a whoop.

"Fergy, your luck's started," he exclaimed joyously. "Here comes a taxi. Now we'll send you down-town in style." He waved aside Ferguson's opening protests. "It's Captain Kidd McCarty or I'm a shad."

He hailed the driver of the slowing vehicle and pushed Ferguson in.

"Cap, this is a friend of mine," he told the well-known Broadway pirate. "He's just fell heir to a million dollars and a red vest. Left him by an aunt. The doctors have dug her up and found poison. My friend expects to be jailed to-morrow. Take him where he will see all the fun he can before daylight."

He slammed the door on the astonished Ferguson and strolled away, whistling.

Captain Kidd McCarty is known as a bold navigator, even if his craft be but a lowly — and noisy — taxicab. Ferguson's heart appeared to rise and expand until it filled his meager chest in response to every narrow escape from collision as they whizzed through the evening wheel-traffic. His leg-muscles ached with effort to hold back the machine by pure psychic force when it appeared, on a score of occasions, that there was no possible escape from fatal smash, but he did not allow his timidity to break forth into the words of caution hoped for by the hardened pilot.

The car drew up with a flourish before a bar well known to the Broadway elect. Ferguson heaved a sigh of relief.

"Here you are, old cock," Captain Kidd McCarty informed Ferguson as he opened the door of the machine. "Start here and work both ways. If you have a dollar left when you start for home, hide it in your shoe or the coppers will grab it," he continued evilly, in a voice to reach the ear of a policeman on a near-by post.

Ferguson did not smile at the rough witticism; he had not entirely recovered from the terror of his ride.

"How much?" he asked.

Captain Kidd McCarty had won his pseudonym in active rivalry with his kind. He spoke carelessly.

"Oh, about four dollars," he said with his eye on Ferguson's now visible roll.

Ferguson was not shocked. His ideas of the market-value of taxicab service were extremely vague. He peeled off a five-dollar bill.

"Keep the change," he said coolly.

The policeman on post must have believed for a moment that the fare had impressed into service some new and shocking weapon. He started forward as Captain Kidd McCarty recoiled, and smiled as though in hope that retribution had claimed his old enemy. Captain Kidd McCarty gasped audibly.

"Holy sufferin' tom-cats!" he appealed with his recovered breath. "What do you want me to do—be ha'nted? That fresh kid with you was a blue-ribbon liar. You ain't no millionaire." He counted out change. "Your fare is sixty-five cents." He dropped the collection of coins in Ferguson's hand, then grabbed a ten-cent piece. "Here," he said, "I'll snatch off this thin dime for a soo-ve-neer drink. I'd like to have your pitcher to show the next tightwad that calls me a buc-ca-neer."

He placed a detaining hand on Ferguson's shoulder.

"Say, son," he said gravely, "let me give you a tip. Next time you see me comin', climb a tree. Don't tempt me twice. An' say," he continued, "do this for me. Don't give Robber Bill Johnson a crack at you with that flat-wheel hansom of his, will you?"

He wagged his head mournfully as he mounted his seat.

FERGUSON looked at the saloon doubtfully, as though rather inclined to stroll along the brilliantly lighted street. He had actually started and

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taken about ten paces when a mood of determination seized him. He felt that he was committed to adventure. He also feared the biting comments, sure to fall in snapping sequence from the lips of Jimmy Buck, should he fail in his quest. He turned back and entered the swinging doors.

He was greeted with acclaim by a crowd at one end of the bar. A fat man disentangled himself from the gathering and grasped him by the arm.

"Here's another," the fat man announced. "This just makes tally on the drinks. See what he'll have," he commanded the bartender.

Ferguson was hustled into the press and had three "port wines" in front of him before he could return the hospitality of his new friends. They were rolling dice on the polished oak.

"Shoot crap?" questioned the fat man. Ferguson admitted a slight working-knowledge.

"Hold the bones! Let the gentleman get down a bet! Fade him," he ordered, almost snatching one of Ferguson's yellow-backed bills and tossing it in front of the sharp-featured young man, who shuffled the dice in his hand and promptly covered the bet.

Ferguson won. Acting under the instructions of his fat adviser, he accumulated a pile of bills that would have filled his hat. Ferguson felt a deep desire to satisfy the demands of his methodic nature by counting his winnings. He felt embarrassed at robbing such good fellows.

The luck changed suddenly. Ferguson, still under orders, piled bill after bill in the pot. They were whisked away. When all his winnings were gone, Ferguson went down in his pocket. One, two, three, four twenty-dollar bills were changed, wagered and snatched away. Ferguson fingered his last bill. The bartender strolled toward them. He spoke wearily.

"Look a' here, you fellows," he said, "how many times do you expect me to call the figures on you before I come over the bar and put myself to you? You mutts can sling dice among yourselves as much as you want, but you can't run in any sucker-game here. The boss is on an' I just advise the gang of you to hand that feller back his change and bust up the game. If you don't, there ain't nothin' more doin' in this bar for anybody in the crap-line."

Ferguson suddenly found himself alone at the bar, with his original pile of money in front of him.

"Take my advice and beat it," volunteered the genius of the bar. "Don't stack up against that bunch of crooks unless you want to work a few weeks payin' back the coin they'll slip away from you. You look like a pretty decent sort of chap. Have a drink on the house an', th' next time you have too much money, buy your girl a shiner or slip a wad under your wife's piller an' see her grin."

Ferguson strolled up Broadway, his recovered wealth stuffed carelessly in his coat-pocket. He essayed his first cigarette. The smoke got in his eyes and the end in his mouth spread out into a bitter tasting brush. He threw it away.

Ferguson was also becoming sleepy. He passed lively entrances to other bars and theaters, and envied the happy entr'acte crowds. He felt, somehow, that adventure was not for him, and mentally balanced the choice of evils involved in forcing himself to continue his mapped-out course or returning to Mrs. Peddy's and facing an indignant Jimmy Buck. He speculated on his chances of slipping into his room before Jimmy's return, and the further possibilities of weaving a tale that would deceive Jimmy in the morning. He decided that Jimmy would cheerfully foil any such attempt at deceit—and discovered that his feet hurt.

III

SUDDENLY he heard a cry. It came from the dim depths of a side avenue, light enough only to show the figures of a man and woman in apparent struggle.

Ferguson did not stop to weigh the matter from an adventurous standpoint. He broke into a run, peeling off his coat when he saw the girl sink down a step. The man stood over her as though threatening. Ferguson dropped his coat and aimed a blow at the leering face.

The result astounded him. The man went down on his back with a thump, while Ferguson danced with the agony of pain that ran through his knuckles. The blood of possible Berserker Fergusons ran riot in his spare frame.

"You cur!" he roared at the bully, now starting to his feet.

Before he could deliver another blow, how-

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ever, the man fled. Ferguson followed him for a few steps, then returned to the girl.

She had leaned her head on her arm and shook as though with mighty sobs.

Ferguson touched her shoulder and received another shock. The girl sprang to her feet, threw both arms around his neck and buried her face in his shoulder.

"God bless you, sir," she whimpered. "He might have killed me."

Ferguson felt the blood rush to his cheeks, but a tingle of joy swept through him. He stood his ground manfully and bestowed a a light pat on the girl's back with his uninjured hand. She raised her face and Ferguson saw that she was distractingly pretty.

"He's gone," he said soothingly and, with no trace of boasting, "I don't think he'll come back." Then his mind reverted to the proper form of preferring request to secure the right of protectorate over the gentle sex as practised in his home village.

"May I escort you?" he asked gallantly. "Where do you live?"

The girl took her arms from about his neck and looked straight into his eyes. Ferguson saw that her eyes were shining as though with tears.

"I feel that I can trust you," she said. "I don't belong in this wicked city. I missed the early train home and there is no other until midnight. I had intended to spend the evening with friends, but they were not at home. I was on my way to the station to wait when that—that——"

Ferguson feared another outbreak of weeping, and interrupted.

"You are scared and nervous," he said gently. "If you really trust me, won't you come and have a lunch with me and allow me to see you safely aboard your train?"

The girl made no reply, but Ferguson found her walking beside him, her fingers laid lightly on his arm. His new guardianship made him strong. He hailed a cab as they reached the corner and directed the driver to a much-advertised restaurant.

During the short ride, the girl remained quiet. She cuddled close to him as though still afraid, and Ferguson again felt the thrill of her charm. When they entered the restaurant he followed boldly after the headwaiter, who glanced shrewdly at them and then conducted them to a corner-table sheltered by a large palm.

FERGUSON assured himself at the first glance across the table that the girl was fully as attractive as he had decided in the dim street. He noted the trim figure in its natty gown; and the girl's dark eyes, shaded by her plumed hat, completed his enchantment. She was smiling and Ferguson was happy over her quick recovery from fright and tears. The girl spoke first.

"You are a dear brave man," she said. "I shall always look upon you as my hero. Please don't ask me about myself. Tell me about your life in this great city."

Ferguson winced. He remembered with shame the tales of adventure bandied about the table at Mrs. Peddy's. He felt the loathing expressed so acridly by Jimmy Buck at the imaginative valiants of the Peddy board. He blushed at the mere idea of possibility that he might have fallen low enough to attempt emulation of his former heroes. Narratives of hazard, carefully nurtured in memory from stories related by boarding-house confrères, seemed suddenly insipid and disgusting.

Instead, he started with his life in the little town where he was the pride of his family. He told of the faith of his mother that he would find his place in New York and become a great man. He felt a stab of heart pain as he confessed the sorrow of a maid who had cried when he had told her of his decision to seek his fortune far from the hamlet of his birth.

"Haven't you been home?" the girl queried reproachfully.

"I just can't go home," he declared.

He was speaking to the girl's shining eyes. "Can't you see? Everybody back there is thinking that I am at least the head of a big firm, and I'm only a little old clerk. I've saved some money—more, I expect, than most anybody back home, but I——"

"Are you happy here?"

The girl's voice was tender.

"No!"

Ferguson scared himself with the vigor of his reply and looked about the restaurant to assure that he had not attracted attention.

"I am miserable. I never was made for a big town. I'm just like most of them. I'm just bluffing. I'd like to go home to-morrow. Why, I'm only here because——"

He halted. Then, at the memory of Jimmy Buck, he laughed aloud.

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The girl smiled in return.

"I'm laughing over the one person I know in New York who is not bluffing," he said. "You don't know Jimmie Buck!" He almost inflected the statement into a query.

For another happy half-hour he regaled the girl with a word-picture of Jimmy. He delighted her with descriptions of Jimmy's boarder-baiting, of the pricking administered by Jimmy to the bubbles of boarding-house boasting, and ended with confession of the compelling influence of Jimmy Buck which had sent him out to seek adventure.

When he finished both were silent. The after-theater crowd poured in and filled the tables. The orchestra blared forth in a lively tune. Ferguson thought the girl looked tired.

"Let's start now and walk to the station," he said.

The girl rose without speaking. She remained silent during their walk. Ferguson felt her lean on him and trembled when he felt her hand press his side with a motion of caress. The idea of parting gave him a pang.

They halted outside the entrance to the big station and stepped into the shadowy angle of a heavy column. Ferguson decided on a direct appeal.

"Won't you please tell me who you are and when I can see you again?" he pleaded.

Ferguson was startled at the effect of his question. The girl snatched her hand from his arm and stepped directly in front of him. "Tell me, are you going home?" she demanded. She took his hands in hers.

"Tell me! I want you to go back to that mother and that girl."

"But," Ferguson began, "you haven't told me who you are."

The girl dropped his hands and stood very erect, out of reach of his arms. Tears burst from her eyes and ran down her cheeks, but she did not sob.

"Yes, I'll tell you who I am!" she spoke each word distinctly. "I'll tell you who I am! I'm Gertie Bell, the slickest girl crook out of Chicago, and you're the most decent, white man that a bad, wicked woman ever took for a come-on.

"Hold on!" she commanded as Ferguson stepped toward her. "I'm going to get this out of my system. It won't hurt you any worse than it hurts me.

"THAT fight I had was a plant, with me and Tommy Magill in our favorite act. It was all planned for you or some other sucker to interfere. I'm sorry now you didn't give me a belt like you handed Tommy. Why he could have eat you and chewed the bones. He was mad enough to do it too, when you hit him so quick and unexpected, if I hadn't give him the slide-sign while he was getting up. Why, I was laughing when I hid my face.

"I frisked your roll out of your pocket while you and Tommy were having your scrap. I got your stick-pin while I was hugging you, and your watch while we were in the cab. I put your roll back when you turned out to be just such a decent, noble chap as I might have married if I'd stuck to the curly-headed boy back home instead of coming to these God-forsaken cities. I had to put it in the wrong pocket, but you didn't notice. According to the rules, I should have made some excuse and ducked away from you in the restaurant. I just couldn't. I tried hard to get your pin and watch back on the way down, but my hands were too nervous. Here they are."

Ferguson received an impression that the big steel and granite station rocked at that moment. He reached out and took his watch and pin without knowing what he was doing. He could not speak. The girl spoke again and her voice was soft.

"Well, I must go back to the harvest-field," she said wearily. "I don't mind lying to Tommy Magill about the failure of the night's work. But I've got just one request to make. I want to kiss one decent man without robbing him. May I?"

Ferguson kissed her.

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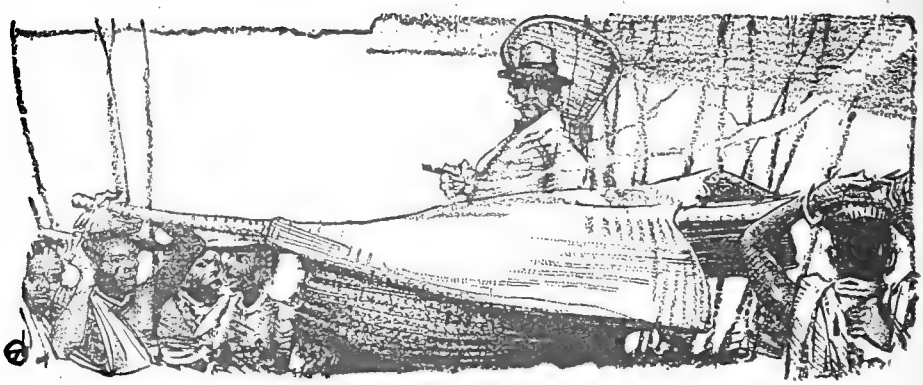

AMERICAN KINGS

by Cromwell Childe

NOTE—It is almost needless to say that no article on the above subject can be exact. In the nature of things, reports of stray American Kings are likely to be contradictory, and rumor mixes easily with information. The author claims only to have collected all the data available and sifted fact from fancy to the best of his ability.—THE EDITOR.

ONLY a few months ago, in the jungles of Central Africa, "King" Rogers died, shot down by British soldiers in the regions he had made his own by clever diplomacy and fierce despotism over the savage tribes. A trader in ivory, what is known as an "elephant-poacher," James Ward Rogers had become a real monarch, with a royal organization that would have been a credit to any hereditary prince. There have been many American kings, able soldiers of fortune, who have managed in far distant regions to gain their crowns by building up a new kingdom or acquiring one already existing. History scarcely tells of a better one than this same Rogers.

He died merely by chance, cut down by a stray bullet after a chase described in Captain Foran's article in the March ADVENTURE.

James Ward Rogers was an American. He had wandered forth into strange and romantic lands. Success had come to him finally in African wilds. Rogers became a thorn to British business-interests. Orders went forth that he was to be taken, dead or alive.

Listen to part of the story of his capture—by Captain Fox—from the official report that has recently come through from the British Colonial Office in London.

"The pursuers had spent weeks plunging through a jungle that had almost defied passage, Rogers cunningly leading them through the densest of swamps, forest and across deep streams. Before being overtaken he had crossed the Nile into the Belgian Congo. The expedition pushed forward for six weeks before the quarry was located. Fox and his men had worn their clothes to tatters and their supplies were exhausted.

"The chase led over a mountain, with Rogers's men only a short distance in advance. As they fled, the ape-like natives sent back taunts and jeers at their pursuers. In the jungle into which they at last descended from the mountains, Fox's party came suddenly upon a camp. A native approached the English officer and said:

" 'The commander wants you to come in. He is sick and can not come out.' "

In a hut, dimly lighted by a candle, Captain Fox found a white man lying on a pallet. It was no one else than this stalwart American King.

He was dying, but there was life in him

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yet. His Royal Majesty, surrounded by his negroes, his army and his court, glared up into the face of the British soldier. He pulled a revolver from under a blanket and brandished it.

"Shot by your men!" he said. "I didn't think they could kill Old Rogers, but they have got him this time. Still," he sneered, "you are in Belgian territory, and you stand more chance of arrest than I do."

A noise in his throat interrupted him. "Say, did you hear that!" he exclaimed. "That's the death-rattle. I've heard that too many times to make any mistake."

And so, with his British captor looking down on him, the king died.

Hot from the press, scarcely longer ago than yesterday, this story is told of one of these picturesque American kings. It will be long, in all probability, before there appears in the annals of heroic exploit and constructive ability another such man as Rogers. Rogers made his kingdom by pure grit and pluck. Not every king that hails from the United States imitates him. Some get their kingdoms by pure chance, through the liking of a tribe, and perhaps the plainly expressed admiration of its princess. Such was the method by which Edward Thompson of Albion, Illinois, became King Nambuka of the Fijis of Naikeva Island.

KING NAMBUKA OF ALBION, ILL.

THOMPSON was a sailor boy and a wanderer. He was scarcely twenty-one when a girl, to whom he had been engaged in his native town, wedded another. Thereupon the young fellow left civilization and roved. Naturally, he did not plan one day to be an actual king, and far in the South Seas to find a beautiful wife, who would make him forget the girl of Illinois. But so it turned out. He not only wed a dusky princess, but by the time he was twenty-three sat on a throne. He has left a Prince and Princess of a new dynasty—Sabu Thu, a son, and Mathutha, daughter. His wife, Princess Lakanita, mourns him, and on a rock over his grave are the words which this "American King" himself cut during his lifetime:

"Faith and love, which civilization denied me, here among the Fijis I have found."

This King won his kingdom at a bound. It was settled, in one feminine mind at least, the first moment he looked into the eyes of Princess Lakanita, when, after much rough voyaging over the South Seas, he finally stepped ashore at Tanga Vatu, a village in the Kingdom of King Latu Nanu, on Naikeva Island, a small island of the eastern group of the Fijis. The women of this island are among the most beautiful of these southern waters, and the clean-cut, athletic, handsome young American seemed the king of men to the Princess, for in a love passage in Spanish, which the daughter of the savage King spoke well, she told him:

"I could love you, for you are the most beautiful man I have ever seen, but I dare not, because of my father and Mbanjbu, whom I must wed."

Thompson's chance was not yet, and he never thought it was to be. Owing to the anger of the native King, incited by Lakanita's warrior lover, the schooner and its white men had to sail away. The American could not forget, however. He dreamed of his island beauty, and it was with joy, a few months later, that he received a worn-out messenger from her, in a canoe. Lakanita, the man said, sent a message to the white man with the blue eyes. There had been a revolt, her native lover had been slain, she and her father were in exile. Would he come and save them?

The Illinois boy rose to the occasion. He led his comrades back, carried the Princess and her father on the schooner, invaded the capital and won a battle from the rebels, only to see the savage King fall dead from a boomerang. Then quickly followed dramatic events, almost too theatrical to be real, though real they were. The pretty Princess became Queen. Just as the blue-eyed hero was about to leave her, he came down with a fever. The young Queen nursed him faithfully, in her own bungalow, watching over him night and day.

He was again about to go when one day he saw her just outside the bungalow, weeping bitterly. The love-story now reaches its climax.

"Why, what is the matter?" he tenderly asked.

"Lakanita fought death when it tried to take you from me, and now the white men will take you from me."

"I must go with my comrades now," he said, "but I will come back to you soon and stay a long time, and then, if you do not tire of me, I will never leave you again."

"I don't want you to leave me now," she

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said. "Death has taken my father and Mbanjbu. Stay, and you will be my King and Naikeva's King. The tribesmen love you and call you Walla Nambuka, and even now they are sad to hear that your going is near. Stay, and I and my tribesmen will love you, and we will all live in peace and happiness together."

Yet the young American shook his head. Love on a savage island, among a savage tribe, was too strange to him. Tenderly he pushed aside the throne and the crown offered him by the little brown hands. The Princess mourned, but quietly. On the day the schooner was to sail, Thompson found her on a rock overlooking the sea.

"Why are you here, my Princess," he said.

"I want to follow you, but the ocean is so wide."

The Illinois boy put his arms around the savage maid,

"Come, my Lakanita, I will not leave you."

And so, Edward Thompson, sailor, became an actual king, head of a real kingdom though small, and reigned over fifteen years. Here is the fashion in which a newspaper correspondent described their wedding:

"It was a double celebration in honor of the wedding of the Princess and the Coronation of King Nambuka. The Naikeva maidens threw off their mourning-robes and donned their short skirts again. The bamboo-leaves were taken from their doors and dancing and merriment ruled again. The boat-crews, when they weighed anchor, fired a parting salute from their rifles, revolvers and shot guns in honor of King Nambuka and Queen Lakanita.

"Never were a king and queen more beloved than were Nambuka and Lakanita. The island flourished in its tropical bounty, but Nambuka was not prone to teach them the ways of civilization. He preferred that they remain happy in their simple faith and ignorance of civilization's vices. He was good and kind, and generous and just, and this was why there was great sorrow through the island when Nambuka died."

THE FOE OF GOD

THE next king to be chronicled is of a very different order. In his story there is not a single flutter of a petticoat, not a solitary feminine wile. He was a hard, grim fighting-man, and his great distinction is that he is the very first King in American records, a King in the very earliest of American days, who almost accomplished what would have changed the entire course of American history. He was on the verge of founding a great Indian empire in the West. He got so far with his ambition as to be some sort of a monarch for ten years, and failed only because the Spaniards, then masters of the Southwest, fought him with seasoned troups.

This was Pope, the King of the Pueblos. He is largely forgotten now, but there was a day when his name struck terror over many hundreds of miles. How a white man could become chief over hundreds of Indians, and lead them gallantly and successfully to battle, has never been understood. But Pope did. He snuffed out Spanish domination in at least one section of the Southwest, and it needed a well-equipped army to conquer him at last.

Pope goes back into history. He much antedated George Washington, who, tradition says, could have been an undisputed American king. It is two hundred and thirty years ago—to be exact, on August 10, 1680—that Pope put his crown on his head and assumed sovereignty over New Mexico and the regions adjoining it, establishing his court at Santa Fé. He himself was a native of the Rio Grande. He first organized his revolution at Taos, arousing the Indians by speeches regarding the wrongs put upon them by the white men. With very able generalship, he made his kingdom with a single blow, killing every Spaniard within reach, and every priest. Then he sent out the following impious message:

"I have killed God and the Virgin Mary, and I will kill every Spaniard that remains."

He tore down every church and announced death as the punishment for even thinking of the Great White God, whom he had "blotted out."

This King of the Pueblos was an autocrat. He ruled for ten years, constantly fighting to extend his domain. In the end this was his undoing. For the crafty King of Spain and his advisers carefully watched the pretender and, when he began to be weakened, poured troops into Sante Fé and promptly executed the false Monarch in the plaza.

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THE PHONOGRAPH THAT MADE A MONARCH OF A CURB-BROKER

THERE is no war or bloodshed in the story that tells of the crowning and rule of Archibald C. Everett, whom some thousands of savage people in the South Seas call "Eta Moroa," the "Immaculate One." If he has not been deposed or has not met death, "Eta Moroa," formerly New York curb-broker, in his suit of cotton-duck and his pith helmet, barefooted because it is more comfortable and the undisputed fashion among his subjects, still rules the island of Arorai, in the Gilbert Islands. The last time he was heard from was early in 1911, and then he was the most popular king of his region, with hundreds of devoted subjects and many tributary peoples.

How Everett happened to become a king is very romantic. A few years ago he was a very active New York boulevardier, making a good income down in Wall Street, a gay bachelor with many friends. Then things began to go wrong. Everett struggled against fate, but vainly. Finally the market went the wrong way for him, and one day he found himself "wiped out," with little more than the clothes he stood in. Evidently he thought it time to make a complete change in his life. He disappeared, and when his friends next heard of him some three years later he had become a King.

He got his kingdom through inheritance. The Kingly mantle fairly dropped down upon his shoulders. It came to him because of a phonograph which happened to be among his traps! The island of Arorai had an old King who had many wives but no children. The South Seas had not been treating Everett very well. He had drifted about them for a year, now making a small "strike," oftener going hungry. At last he came to Arorai as a trader, and his luck changed.

The old King took a fancy to the man that from time to time had hypnotized Broadway, and wanted to adopt him. He liked Everett from the first. What clinched matters, however, was the phonograph. Everett told about it in one of the letters he sent back to America.

"I had a Winchester repeating-rifle, a reloading-outfit, a small camera, an extra fine telescope of French make and a phonograph with me, when I arrived at Arorai. The phonograph was the chief attraction, for, although many of the natives had heard phonographs before in the trade-rooms of visiting schooners, none of them had been initiated into the mysteries of the recording-needle and the wax cylinder. I had a few blanks among my traps and, although the climate was hard on them, or rather, soft on them, they answered my purpose after a fashion. I first used one like this:

"The old King wandered over to my place one day, half full of gin as usual, which he secured from the visiting traders. He took a seat on my porch and amused himself by looking through my telescope, which he had frequently offered to buy. Suddenly he burst out into an old war-chant in native dialect. I had been experimenting with the cylinders and felt that the time had come for me to spring a surprise on him.

"I wound up the machine, slipped in a blank cylinder, adjusted the recording needle and asked Aoa to sing into the horn. He objected at first, as he was suspicious of magic, but I persuaded him that it was a harmless bit of magic, and he roared out a verse or two of Polynesian war-song. He had a deep bass voice with a peculiar timbre to it that was ideal for reproducing-purposes.

"When I changed the needle and reversed the machine, you should have been there to see the circus. As the phonograph roared back the words of the song, Aoa straightened up and his eyes fairly stood out of his head. His naked retainers, who had been lying around in front of the place, got up on their feet and listened with opened mouths.

"The King made me repeat the song again and again until I grew tired of winding up the spring, and then he summoned his men and made haste to his palace. That night I was summoned to appear before His Majesty with my magic box. Every man, woman and child on the island was present and dressed for the occasion.

"A pile of fine mats were spread for me at the royal threshold and the King bade me to turn on the music. I'll never forget the scene to my dying day. It was a quiet night. The sea was still and although we were but an eighth of a mile from the beach I could barely distinguish the lapping of the waves upon the sands.

"Fully five hundred brown people were

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kneeling before me in a wide semicircle, in utter silence. Every star in the heavens seemed to be out and the moon was full, as was the King. He had on his full regalia for the occasion, and you will most probably smile when I tell you that it consisted of an abominably heavy frock coat of thick, twilled goods, a long necklace of shark's teeth and a silk hat.

"I had on my suit of white duck, which had been freshly laundered that afternoon by one of my handmaidens. I placed the phonograph on a firm foundation of gin-cases covered with mats and, after fixing the reproducer and attaching my largest horn, I released the lever.

"As the voice of the King came out of the horn, full and sonorous, the savages listened in awe. At the conclusion of the song a perfect silence prevailed until the King addressed his people. I understood a part of what he had to say. It was an address of welcome to a man he had chosen for his son. He bade them to honor me after the style of the islands."

It was in this fashion that the ex-Wall Street broker became a real savage prince. He was "Eta Moroa, the White Chief," then and thereafter. The warriors threw down their clubs before him, and the women buried them beneath flowers. Everett was now "tapu," which is "sacred." All white traders thenceforth did business with him as if he were the actual king.

The old King died. His death must have been a curious scene, and it is certain a new king was never crowned as was Archibald Everett of Broadway. Aoa of Arorai lay dying upon a mat in his hut, his body-guard grouped around him. The magic of his wise men had failed to cure. He called Everett to his side feebly, and again proclaimed him his son. Then, with trembling hands, he lifted what he had made his badge of royalty, his chief decoration and pride—his silk hat. He placed it on the American's head. "Eta Moroa" had been given a "kingly crown."

No more news comes from Arorai, and the American is probably still reigning in his suit of white duck. According to all accounts he is a very businesslike king, having added greatly to the prosperity of his people. The chief industry of the island is copra, the kernel of the coconut, dried. King Everett handles his throne in a modern and commerical way. He gets ten per cent. of everything, and some day may come back to America many times a millionaire.

THE INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY

THEN there is Homer Lea, hunchback, man of letters, writer of plays, diplomat and traveler, who is said to know more about the inside of China than any other living man. Two or three years ago he had a chance of becoming Chinese Emperor. That would have been the greatest achievement of any American in the direction of royal robes and, though little General Lea did not carry off the prize, he came so close to it and figured so eminently among the "great ones" of the reigning dynasty that he should certainly stand in this list of "American Kings."

For a year or more now nothing has been heard of Homer Lea. He may be in England, he may be in the Orient, forging his clever thunderbolts which more than one ambitious Chinaman has had cause to fear. Even yet Homer Lea may emerge from out of somewhere and strike terror to ambitious Chinamen. He has been for years the one factor in the Empire that can not be appraised nor be estimated, that no one can figure out.

Homer Lea has been called the "international man of mystery." He was first heard of when he came out of the robber-infested regions of Tartary, fifteen to twenty years ago, at the time when the Boxer troubles began to arouse the civilized world. Then Lea was the guest in the house of a Chinese Mandarin whom he had somehow hypnotized. Why, no one knew, the English and Americans least of all. What the Chinese knew they would not tell. But gradually the little hunchback grew in power until he became the leader of those who were fighting for the restoration of the Emperor—a prisoner in the Purple Palace.

The Boxer uprising threw China into a state of insurgency. Lea remained supreme. He made a marvelous thousand-mile journey, and would have succeeded and might to-day have been sitting on the throne of China, had it not been for the death of his ally, Tong Tsoi Shang, a powerful friend of the Emperor, who had been executed.

He received a golden star bearing the Emperor's medallion and a commission as Lieutenant-General in the Chinese Army. Till the death of the Emperor Kwang Hsu

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he was behind the throne in power. Since that day his efforts have been directed toward the abolishment of the Wo Wong Woey Society, a secret organization of China. What he will accomplish no one can tell.

He wears the full fatigue-uniform of a general, with the Chinese dragon in gold upon his cap, and his buttons bear the coiled dragon surrounded by three stars.

THE MORMON KING OF BIG BEAVER ISLAND

OF COURSE, Homer Lea has not as yet become a real King, though he has closely approached it. James Jesse Strange was a very decided King on the other hand, and moreover, he built his kingdom in the heart of the United States. For a time he had great success, and planted his capital fearlessly under the very nose of the Republic, on the Great Lakes.

At first the President and his Cabinet—this was just before the Civil War—thought King James a joke, not worth while regarding. But the kingdom grew into amazing magnitude and power. James Jesse Strange was really a genius and something of a statesman. He created this kingdom when he was only twenty-seven, by fraud, it is true, but he must have had no small amount of ability and magnetism to attract all the followers he did. Strange was a frontier lawyer and a brilliant orator. In the forties and the fifties, men of persuasion and determination, and forceful with their tongues, swept the new West. The man who afterward made himself King attracted the attention of the Mormon leaders, then located at Nauvoo, Ill., and was speedily induced to join them. These were the days before Brigham Young, when the founder, Joseph Smith, was leading the Saints. When the Westerners arose against the prophet, jailed him and then killed him, Strange, by this time a chief lieutenant, saw his chance. He forged a letter and brought it forward. The letter purported to be from Smith, saying that God had come to him in a vision commanding that Strange should take up the work and establish a new city.

The Mormons thereupon split, but the lawyer who would be King was strong enough to lead many with him. On Big Beaver Island in southern Michigan—and Strange has ever since been known as the "King of Big Beaver Island"—he established his kingdom. It succeeded beyond all dreams. No records have been preserved of the size to which it grew, but it was a very prosperous community, ruled by an iron hand. On the island a city was established—St. James. With much mummery, which, however, was very effective, the King produced what came to be known as the "Voree tablets." These were a revised edition of the "Ten Commandments," and, King James claimed, superseded them. They aroused intense excitement, and hundreds believed in them.

Of course in any event this King among the lakes of Michigan could not have been allowed to continue. The United States Government, sooner or later, would have found it imperative to have stepped in. But King James, able as he was in other respects, hastened the day. He grew arrogant and defiant. He was an editor and a publisher as well as King. He printed a newspaper and wrote books and articles that were widely copied. He got to be a scandal, and the first thing the King knew a war-ship was despatched to his realms and carried him off on a charge of treason.

Even to this day, it is remembered how King James defended himself in the court in Detroit and actually got acquitted. He was his own lawyer, and he cleverly pleaded his cause. How he persuaded the jurymen will never be understood. He spoke for religious tolerance, and the jurymen sympathized with him. That he himself had been intolerant and arrogant, judge and jury alike forgot. That he had set up a throne in the midst of a republic, a fact that was unquestioned, no one remembered. The power of a brilliant mind carried all before it.

King James was acquitted, but after that he became less and less a King. His people had expected more of him. They had looked for miracles, when he was haled to court. They anticipated the supernatural from him. It was thought that he would give some "sign" that would terrify all his enemies and prove that he was at least half a god. Though not expressed, there was a feeling of disappointment among all his subjects, and the enthusiasm weakened. The "King" was at last tracked down by assassins in the pay of his confidential adviser, and, after lingering some days, died of his wounds. His body now lies in an unmarked grave. The "kingdom" disintegrated, and now that fifty years have gone

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by practically nothing of it remains on Big Beaver Island.

A NAVAL LIEUTENANT THROWS AWAY A THRONE

BUT the story of the kings of America has its most interesting and seemingly most impossible incident in the historic chapter of the United States Navy-Officer who was offered the throne of Samoa by three great Governments of the world, and refused it. Lieutenant Charles S. Ripley was the man. The strange feature of this real romance is that Ripley was not adopted by a King, did not get the chance of reigning through superior prowess. He was discovered, on the death of a certain Samoan King, to be the next in line, the heir apparent. As a matter of fact, he was the King, legally and beyond a question. He had a difficult time in making the Powers see that he would not become a King under any circumstances. He simply gave up the kingship, letting it pass to the next in line.

Probably there never has been another American before or since who by right of descent has been a king. It came about in this way. Lieutenant Ripley had an ancestor, a great-great-uncle, who had sailed from Maine, and had never come back. It was always supposed by the Ripleys that he had been lost at sea. Nothing so commonplace! What had really happened was that he had been wrecked on the shores of Samoa, and had grown up as a savage. Lieutenant Ripley heard of this when he was a navy-officer, stationed at Samoa, aboard the *Vandalia*, for the purpose of safeguarding American interests in the harbor of Apia. It was the time of a diplomatic quarrel, and the United States, England and Germany each had war-ships on guard.

The King of Samoa at that time was one Malietoa. In such cases it is the custom of the naval officers of various nations to meet the reigning sovereign. Etiquette has to be nicely preserved under these conditions. It was extraordinary the interest the Samoan King took in Lieutenant Ripley. He showed him every honor, and more than once took him aside and asked him question after question about his family.

One of these little conferences terminated dramatically. Suddenly the King threw his arms about the Lieutenant's neck and told him that he was of his own family, of the ruling house of Samoa, and next in line to the throne after his own son, the Crown Prince. The King, a systematic old potentate, was sure. The Ripley that had vanished years before and had for generations been thought drowned was Malietoa's own grandfather.

When such records as there were were looked up, the Samoan King was seen to be right. The news did not greatly interest the American naval officer. He had no fancy to rule in the Pacific and no love for dark-skinned princesses. As a matter of diplomacy he had to submit to a sort of adoption as a son of Malietoa. Nothing else would satisfy the old monarch, and Ripley went through it, half with a curious sort of pleasure, half bored and disgusted.

Then the scene changed for the Lieutenant. He was called away on other duty. Several years went by and he was in turn in many other parts of the world. Malietoa, meanwhile, was deposed, and a new king came to the throne. Then Malietoa was recalled. Finally he died, and his own son having also passed away, a new King was needed. The international commission of Great Britain, the United States and Germany, sifted every available piece of evidence to find who was the heir. The weight of evidence was that it was Lieutenant Ripley. His claims were indisputable. A formal notification was drawn up by the three powers. The long legal document could have been expressed in a single phrase, for that was its kernel:

"You are the King."

In answer to it Ripley wrote but a short note. Such a note was never written before. He would rather be a United States Navy-Officer, he said, than a King anywhere. He respectfully refused any crown, that of Samoa in particular. The next in line must be chosen.

Lieutenant Ripley is living yet. He has retired from the navy and occupies a great castle in Colorado. After he left the navy, having served thirty-five years, he commenced to prospect for gold. He is many times a millionaire, and married an Illinois girl after he had won his riches. He says he has never regretted throwing over the Samoan crown.

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ARACHI
The BORROWER
by
Edgar Wallace

MANY years ago, the Monrovian government sent one Bosambo, a native of the Kroo coast and consequently a thief, to penal servitude for the term of his natural life. Bosambo, who had other views on the matter, was given an ax and a saw in the penal settlement and told to cut down and trim certain mahogany-trees, in company with other unfortunate men similarly circumstanced.

To assure themselves of Bosambo's obedience, the Government of Liberia set over him a number of compatriots armed with weapons which had rendered good service at Gettysburg, and had been presented to the President of Liberia by President Grant. They were picturesque weapons, but they were somewhat deficient in accuracy, especially when handled by the inexpert soldiers of the Monrovian coast. Bosambo, who put his ax to an ignoble use, no less than the slaying of one Captain Peter Cole —who was as black as the ten of clubs, but a gentleman by the Liberian code—left the penal settlement with passionate haste. The Gettysburg relics made fairly good practise up to two hundred yards, but Bosambo was a mile away before the guards, searching the body of their dead commander for the key of the ammunition-store, had secured food for their lethal weapons.

The Government offered a reward of fifty pounds for Bosambo, dead or alive, but although the reward was claimed, and paid to the half-brother of the Secretary of War, it is a fact that Bosambo was never caught.

On the contrary, he made his way to a far land, and became, by virtue of his attainments, chief of the Ochori.

Bosambo was too good a sportsman to leave his persecutors at peace. There can be little doubt that the Kroo insurrection, which cost the Liberian government £821 16s. od. to suppress, was due to the instigation and assistance of Bosambo.

The second rebellion was a more serious and expensive affair, and it was at the conclusion of this that the Liberian government made representations to Britain. Sanders, who conducted an independent inquiry into the question of Bosambo's complicity, reported that there was no evidence whatever that Bosambo was directly or indirectly responsible, and with that the Liberian government was forced to be content, but they expressed their feelings by offering a reward of four hundred pounds for Bosambo alive or dead — preferably alive. The news of this price went up and down the coast and very far into the interior, yet strangely enough Arachi of the Isisi did not learn of it till many years afterward.

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ARACHI was of the Isisi people, and a great borrower. Up and down the river all men knew him for such, so that his name passed into the legendary vocabulary of the people while he yet lived, and did the wife of Koka beg from the wife of O'taki the service of a cooking-pot, be sure that O'taki's wife would agree, but with heavy pleasantry scream after the retiring pot, "O thou shameless Arachi!" whereupon all the village-folk who heard the jest would rock with laughter.

Arachi was the son of a chief, but in a country where chieftainship was not hereditary and where moreover many chiefs' sons dwelt without distinction, his parentage was of little advantage.

He was tall and thin and his knees were curiously knobbly. He carried his head on one side importantly, and was profoundly contemptuous of his fellows.

Once he came to Sanders.

"LORD," he said, "I am a chief's son, as you know, and I am very wise. Men who look upon me say, 'Behold, this young man is full of craft,' because of my looks. Also I am a great talker."

"There are many in this land who are great talkers, Arachi," said Sanders unpleasantly, "yet they do not travel for two days down-stream to tell me so."

"Master," said Arachi impressively, "I come to you because I desire advancement. Many of your little chiefs are fools, and moreover unworthy. Now I am the son of a chief, and it is my wish to sit down in the place of my father. Also, lord, remember this, that I have dwelt among foreign people, the Angola folk, and speak their tongue."

Sanders sighed wearily.

"Seven times you have asked me, Arachi," he said, "and seven times I have told you you are no chief for me. Now I tell you this, that I am tired of seeing you, and if you come to me again, I will throw you to the monkeys." *

Unabashed, Arachi returned to his village, for he knew in his heart that Sandi was jealous of his great powers.

HE BUILT a great hut at the end of the village, borrowing his friends' labor. This he furnished with skins and the like, and laid in stores of salt and corn, all of which he had secured from neighboring villages by judicious promises of payment.

It was like a king's hut, so glorious were the hangings of skin and the stretched bed of hide, and the people of his village said "Ko!" believing that Arachi had dug up those hidden treasures which every chief is popularly supposed to possess in secret places to which his sons may well be privy.

Even those who had helped to supply the magnificence were impressed and comforted.

"I have lent Arachi two bags of salt," said Pidini, the chief of Kolombolo, the fishing-village, "and my stomach was full of doubt, though he swore by death that he would repay me three days after the rains. Now I see that he is indeed very rich, as he told me he was, and if my salt does not return to me I may seize his fine bed."

In another village across the river Ombili, a head-man of the Isisi, confided to his wife:

"Woman, you have seen the hut of Arachi. Now I think you will cease your foolish talk. For you have reproached me bitterly because I lent Arachi my fine bed."

"Lord, I was wrong," said the woman meekly, "but I feared he would not pay you the salt he promised. Now I know that I was foolish, for I saw many bags of salt in his hut."

The story of Arachi's state spread up and down the river, and when the Borrower demanded the hand of Korari, the daughter of the chief of the Putani, she came to him without much palaver, though she was rather young.

A straight and winsome girl, well worth the thousand rods and the twenty bags of salt which the munificent Arachi promised by death, devils and a variety of gods should be delivered to her father when the moon and the river stood in certain relative positions.

Now Arachi did no manner of work whatever, save to walk through the village street at certain hours, clad in a robe of monkey-tails which he had borrowed from the brother of the King of the Isisi.

He neither fished nor hunted nor dug in the field.

He talked to Korari his wife and explained why this was so. He talked to her from sunset until the early hours of the morning, for he was a great talker and when he was

*Colloquial—"make you look foolish."

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on his favorite subject—which was Arachi—he was very eloquent. He talked to her till the poor child's head rocked from side to side, and from front to back, in her desperate sleepiness.

He was a great man, beloved and trusted of Sandi. He had immense thoughts and plans, plans that would insure him a life of ease without the distressing effects of labor. Also Sanders would make him chief—in good time.

She should be as a queen. (She would much rather have been in her bed and asleep.)

Though no Christian, Arachi was a believer in miracles. He pinned his faith to the supreme miracle of living without work, and was near to seeing the fulfilment of that wonder.

But the miracle which steadfastly refused to happen was the miracle which would bring him relief at a moment when his numerous creditors were clamoring for the repayment of the many and various articles which they had placed in his care.

It is an axiom that the hour brings its man. Most assuredly it brings its creditor.

There was a tumultuous and stormy day when the wrathful benefactors of Arachi gathered in full strength and took from him all that was takable, and this in the face of the village, to Korari's great shame. Arachi, on the contrary, because of his high spirit, was neither ashamed nor distressed, even though many men spoke harshly.

"Oh, thief and rat!" said the exasperated owner of a magnificent stool of ceremony, the base of which Arachi had contrived to burn, "is it not enough that you should steal the wear of these things? Must you light your fires by my beautiful stool?"

Arachi replied philosophically and without passion; they might take his grand furnishings—which they did; they might revile him in tones and in language the most provocative—this also they did; but they could not take the noble hut which their labors had built, because that was against the law of the tribe, nor could they rob him of his faith in himself, because that was contrary to the laws of nature—Arachi's nature.

"My wife," he said to the weeping girl, "these things happen. Now I think that I am the victim of fate. Therefore I purpose changing all my gods. Such as I have do not serve me, and if you remember I spent many hours in the forest with my *bete*."

Arachi had thought of many possible contingencies. As for instance:

Sandi might relent and appoint him to a great chieftainship.

Or he might dig from the river-bed some such treasure as U'fabi, the N'Gombi man, did once upon a time.

Arachi, entranced with this latter idea, went one morning before sunrise to a place by the shore and dug. He turned nineteen spadefuls of earth before an infinite weariness fell upon him and he gave up the search.

"For," he argued, "if treasure is buried in the river-bed, it might as well be there as elsewhere; and if it be not there, where may it be?"

Arachi bore his misfortune with philosophy. He sat in the bare and bleak interior of his hut and explained to his wife that the men who had robbed him hated him and were jealous of him because of his great powers, and that one day, when he was a great chief, he would borrow an army from his friends the N'Gombi, and put fire to their houses.

Yes, indeed, he said "borrow," because it was his nature to think in loans.

His father-in-law came on the day following the deporting, thinking to save something from the wreckage on account of Korari's dowry, but he was very late.

"Oh, son of shame!" he said bitterly, "is it thus you repay for my priceless daughter? By death but you are a wicked man!"

"Have no fear, fisherman," said Arachi loftily, "for I am a friend of Sandi, and be sure that he will do that for me what will place me high above common men. Even now I go to make a long palaver with him, and when I return you shall hear news of strange happenings."

Arachi was a most convincing man, possessing the powers of all great borrowers, and he convinced his father-in-law—a relation who, from the beginning of time, has always been the least open to conviction.

He left his wife and she, poor woman, glad to be relieved of the presence of her loquacious husband, probably went to sleep.

At any rate, Arachi came to headquarters at a propitious moment for him. Headquarters at that moment was an armed camp at the junction of the Isisi and Ikeli rivers.

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ON THE top of all his other troubles Sanders had the problem of a stranger who had arrived unbidden. His orderly came to him and told him that a man desired speech of him.

"What manner of man?" asked Sanders wearily.

"Master," said the orderly, "I have not seen a man like him before."

Sanders went out to inspect his visitor. The stranger rose and saluted, raising both hands, and the Commissioner looked him over. He was not of any of the tribes he knew, being without the face-cuts laterally descending either cheek which mark the Bomongo, neither was he tattooed on the forehead like the people of the Little River.

"Where do you come from?" asked Sanders in Swahili, which is the *lingua Franca* of the continent, but the man shook his head. So Sanders tried him again, this time in Bomongo, thinking from his face marks that he must be a man of the Bokeri people. But he answered in a strange tongue.

"*Quel nom avez-vous?*" Sanders asked, and repeated the question in Portuguese. To this latter he responded, saying that he was a small chief of the Congo Angola, and that he had left his land to avoid slavery.

"Take him to the men's camp and feed him," said Sanders and dismissed him from his mind.

Sanders had little time to bother about stray natives who might wander into his camp. He was engaged in searching for a gentleman who was known as Abdul Hazim, a great rascal, trading guns and powder contrary to the law.

"And," said Sanders to the Captain of the Houssas, "if I catch him he'll be sorry."

Abdul Hazim shared this view, so kept out of Sanders's way to such purpose that after a week's further wanderings Sanders returned to his headquarters.

Just about then he was dispirited, physically low from the after-effects of fever, and mentally disturbed.

Nothing went right with the Commissioner. There had been a begging letter from H. Q. concerning this same Abdul Hazim. He was in no need of Houssa palavers, yet there must needs come a free fight among these valiant soldiermen and, to crown it all, two hours after the Houssa skipper had gone to bed with a temperature of 104.6.

"Bring the swine here," said Sanders elegantly, when the sergeant of Houssas reported the matter, and there was marched before him the strange man who had come to him from the backlands, and a pugnacious soldier named Kano.

"Lord," said the Houssa, "by my god, who is, I submit, greater than most gods, I am not to blame. This Kaffir dog would not speak to me when I spoke, also he put his hands to my meat, so I struck him."

"Is that all?" asked Sanders.

"That is all, lord."

"And did the stranger do no more than of his ignorance touch your meat—and keep silence when you spoke?"

"No more, lord."

Sanders leaned back in his seat of justice — it was a collapsible field-chair — and scowled horribly at the Houssa.

"If there is one thing more evident to me than another," he said slowly, "it is that a Houssa is a mighty person, a lord, a king. Now I sit here in justice, respecting neither kings, such as you be, nor slaves, such as this silent one. And I judge so, regarding the dignity of none, according to the law of the book. Is that so?"

"That is so, lord."

"And it would seem that it is against the law to raise hand against any man, however much he offends you; the proper course being to make complaint according to the regulations of the service. Is that so?"

"That is so, lord."

"Therefore you have broken the law. Is that truth?"

"That is truth, lord."

"Go back to your lines, admitting this truth to your comrades, and let the Kaffir rest, for on the next occasion, for him that breaks the law, there will be breaking of skin. The palaver is finished."

The Houssa retired.

"And," said Sanders, retailing the matter to the convalescent officer next morning, "I consider that I showed more than ordinary self-restraint in not kicking both of them."

"You're a great man," said the Houssa officer. "You'll become a Colonial-Made Gentleman one of these days unless you're jolly careful."

Sanders passed in silence the Houssa's gibe at the Companionship of St. Michael and St. George, and, moreover, C. M. G.'s

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were not likely to come his way while Abdul Hazim was still at large.

HE WAS in an unpleasant frame of mind when Arachi came swiftly in a borrowed canoe, paddled by four men whom he had engaged at an Isisi village on a promise of payment which it was very unlikely he would ever be able to fulfil.

"Master," said Arachi solemnly, "I come desiring to serve your lordship, for I am too great a man for my village, and, if no chief, behold, I have chief's thoughts."

"And a chief's hut," said Sanders dryly, "if all they tell me is true."

Arachi winced.

"Lord," he said humbly, "all things are known to you, and your eye goes forth like a chameleon's tongue to see round corners."

Sanders passed over the unpleasant picture Arachi suggested.

"Arachi," he said, "it happens that you have come at a moment when you can serve me, for there is in my camp a strange man from a far-away land, who knows not this country, yet desires to cross it. Now, since you know the Angola tongue, you shall take him in your canoe to the edge of the Frenchi land, and there you shall put him on his way. And for this I will pay your paddlers—and as for you, I will remember you in the day of your need."

It was not as Arachi could have wished, but it was something. The next day he departed importantly.

Before he left, Sanders gave him a word of advice.

"Go you, Arachi," he said, "by the Little Kusu River."

"Lord," said Arachi, "there is a shorter way by the creek of Still Waters—this goes to the Frenchi land and is deep enough for our purpose."

"It is a short way and a long way," said Sanders grimly, "for there sits a certain Abdul Hazim, who is a great buyer of men, and because the Angola folk are wonderful gardeners, behold, the Arab is anxious to come by them. Go in peace."

"On my head," said Arachi, and took his leave.

It was rank bad luck that he should meet on his way two of his principal creditors. These, having some grievance in the matter of foodstuffs, advanced, desiring to do him an injury, but on his earnest entreaties postponed the performance of their solemn vows.

"It seems," said one of them, "that you are now Sandi's man, for, though I do not believe anything you have told me, yet these paddlers do not lie."

"Nor this silent one," said Arachi, pointing to his charge proudly. "And because I alone in all the land can make palaver with him, Sandi has sent me on a mission to certain kings. These will give me presents, and on my return I will pay you what I owe, and much more, for love."

They let him pass.

It may be said that Arachi, who "lent to none and believed no man," had no faith whatever in his lord Sandi's story. Who the silent Angola was, what was his mission and why he had been chosen to guard the stranger, Arachi did not guess.

He would have found an easy way to understanding if he had believed all that Sanders had told him, but that was not Arachi's way.

On a night when the canoe was beached on an island and the paddlers prepared the noble Arachi's food, the Borrower questioned his charge.

"How does it happen, foreigner," he asked, "that my friend and neighbor Sandi asks me of my kindness to guide you to the Frenchi land?"

"Patron," said the Angola man, "I am a stranger and desire to escape from slavery. Also there is a small Angola-Balulu tribe, who are of my people and faith, who dwell by the Frenchi tribe."

"What is your faith?" asked Arachi.

"I believe in devils and ju-jus," said the Angola man simply, "especially one called Billimi, who has ten eyes and spits at snakes; also I hate the Arabi, that being part of my faith."

This gave Arachi food for thought, and some reason for the astonishing belief that Sandi might have spoken the truth to him!

"What of this Abdul Arabi?" he asked. "Now I think that Sandi lied to me when he said such a one buys men, for, if this be so, why does he not raid the Isisi?"

But the Angola man shook his head.

"These are matters too high for my understanding," he said. "Yet I know that he takes the Angola because they are great gardeners and cunning in the pruning of trees."

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Again Arachi had reason for thinking profoundly.

This Abdul, as he saw, must come to the Upper River for the people of the Lesser Akasava, who were also great gardeners. He would take no Isisi, because they were notoriously lazy and, moreover, died with exasperating readiness when transplanted to a foreign soil.

He continued his journey till he came to the place where he would have turned off had he taken a short cut to the French territory.

Here he left his paddlers and his guest and made his way up the creek of Still Waters.

HALF a day's paddling brought him to the camp of Abdul. The slaver's silent runners on the bank had kept pace with him, and when Arachi landed he was seized by men who sprang apparently from nowhere.

"Lead me to your master, O common men," said Arachi, "for I am a chief of the Isisi and desire a secret palaver."

"If you are Isisi, and by your thinness and your boasting I see that you are," said his captor, "my lord Abdul will make easy work of you."

Abdul Hazim was short and stout and a lover of happiness. Therefore he had his camp in that condition of readiness which enabled him to leave quickly at the first sight of a white helmet or a Houssa's tarboosh.

For it would have brought no happiness to Abdul had Sanders come upon him.

Now, seated on a soft-hued carpet of silk, before the door of his little tent, he eyed Arachi dubiously, and listened in silence while the man spoke of himself.

"Kaffir," he said, when the Borrower had finished, "how do I know that you do not lie, or that you are not one of Sandi's spies? I think I should be very clever if I cut your throat."

Arachi explained at length why Abdul Hazim should not cut his throat.

"If you say this Angola man is near-by, why should I not take him without payment?" asked the slaver.

"Because," said Arachi, "this foreigner is not the only man in the country, and because I have great influence with Sandi and am beloved by all manner of people who trust me. I may bring many other men to your lordship."

Arachi returned to his camp, towing a small canoe with which the slaver had provided him.

He woke the Angola stranger from his sleep.

"Brother," he said, "here is a canoe with food. Now I tell you to paddle one day up this Creek of Still Waters and there await my coming, for there are evil men about and I fear for your safety."

The Angolean, simple man that he was, obeyed. . . . . Half a day's journey up the creek, Abdul's men were waiting.

Arachi set off for his own village that night, and in his canoe was such a store of cloth, of salt and of brass rods as would delight any man's heart. Arachi came to his village singing a little song about himself.

In a year he had grown rich, for there were many ways of supplying the needs of an Arab slaver, and Abdul paid promptly.

Arachi worked single-handed, or if he engaged paddlers found them in obscure corners of the territories. He brought to Abdul many marketable properties, mostly young N'Gombi women, who are fearful and easily cowed, and Sanders, scouring the country for the stout man with the fez, found him not.

"LORD ABDUL," said Arachi, who met the slaver secretly one night near the Ikusi River, "Sandi and his soldiers have gone down to the Akasava for a killing palaver. Now I think we will do what you wish."

They were discussing an aspect of an adventure—the grandest adventure which Abdul had ever planned.

"Arachi," said Abdul, "I have made you a rich man; now, I tell you that I can make you richer than any chief in this land."

"I shall be glad to hear of this," said Arachi, "for though I am rich, yet I have borrowed many things, and it seems I have so wonderful a mind that I must live always in to-morrow."

"So I have heard," said the Arab, "for they say of you that if you had the whole world you would borrow the moon."

"That is my mystery," said Arachi modestly; "for this reason I am a very notable man."

Then he sat down to listen in patience to the great plan of Abdul Hazim, and it was a very high plan, for there were two thou-

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sand Liberian dollars at the back of it and, for Arachi, payment in kind.

At the moment of the conference, Sanders was housed in the Ochori city, making palaver with Bosambo the chief.

"Bosambo," said Sanders, "I have given you these upper streams to your care, yet Abdul Hazim walks through the land without hurt, and I think it is shame to you and to me."

"Master," said Bosambo, "it is a shameful thing. Yet the streams hereabout are so many and Abdul is a cunning man and has spies. Also, my people are afraid to offend him lest he 'chop' them or sell them into the interior."

Sanders nodded and rose to go aboard the *Zaire*.

"Bosambo," he said, "this government put a price upon this Abdul, even as a certain government put a price upon you."

"What is his price, lord?" asked Bosambo with an awakening of interest.

"One hundred pounds in silver," said Sanders.

"Lord," said Bosambo solemnly, "that is a good price."

Two days after this, when Arachi came to Bosambo, that chief was engaged in the purely domestic occupation of nursing his one small son.

"Greeting, Bosambo," said Arachi, "to you and to your beautiful son, who is noble in appearance and very quiet."

"Peace be to you, Arachi—I have nothing to lend you," said Bosambo.

"Lord," said Arachi loftily, "I am now a rich man—richer than chiefs—and I do not borrow."

"*Ko kol*" said Bosambo, with polite incredulity.

"Bosambo," Arachi went on, "I came to you because I love you and you are not a talking man, but rather a wise and silent one."

"All this I know, Arachi," said Bosambo cautiously, "and again I say to you that I lend no man anything."

The exasperated Arachi raised his patient eyes to heaven.

"Lord Bosambo," he said, in the tone of one hurt, "I came to tell you of what I have found and to ask your Lordship to help me secure it. For in a certain place I have come across a great stock of ivory such as the old kings buried against their need."

"Arachi," said Bosambo of a sudden, "you tell me that you are rich. Now you are a little man and I am a chief, yet I am not rich."

"I have many friends," said Arachi, trembling with pride, "and they give me rods and salt."

"That is nothing," said Bosambo. "Now I understand richness, for I have lived among white folk, who laugh at rods and throw salt to dogs."

"Lord Bosambo," said the other eagerly, "I am rich also by white men's rule—behold!"

From his waist pouch he took a handful of silver and offered it in both hands for the chief's inspection.

Bosambo examined the money respectfully, turning each coin over gingerly.

"That is good riches," he said, and he breathed a little faster than was his wont, "and it is new, being bright. Also the devil-marks, which you do not understand, are as they should be."

The gratified Arachi shoved his money back into his pouch. Bosambo sat in meditative silence, his face impassive.

"And you will take me, Arachi, to the place of buried treasure?" he asked slowly. "Ko! you are a generous man—for I do not know why you should share with me, knowing that I once beat you."

Bosambo put the child down gently. These kings' stores were traditional. Many had been found, and it was the dream of every properly constituted man to unearth such. Yet Bosambo was not impressed, being in his heart skeptical. "Arachi," he said, "I believe that you are a liar, yet I would see this store, and if it be near-by, will see with my own eyes."

It was one day's journey, according to Arachi.

"You shall tell me where this place is," said Bosambo.

Arachi hesitated.

"Lord, how do I know that you will not go and take this store?" he asked.

Bosambo regarded him sternly.

"Am I not an honest man?" he asked. "Do the people from one end of the world to the other swear by the name of Bosambo?"

"No," said Arachi truthfully.

Yet he told of the place. It was by the River of Shadows, near the Crocodile-Pool-Where-the-Floods-Had-Changed-the-Land.

Bosambo went to his hut to make preparations for the journey.

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Behind his house in a big glass cage were many little pigeons. He laboriously wrote in his vile Arabic a laconic message, attached it to the leg of a pigeon. . . . . .

To make absolutely sure, for Bosambo left nothing to chance, he sent away a canoe secretly that night, for a certain destination.

"And this you shall say to Sandi," said the chief to his trusted messenger, "that Arachi is rich with the richness of silver and that silver has the devil-marks of Zanzibar, being the home of all traders, as your Lordship knows."

NEXT day at dawn, Bosambo and his guide departed. They paddled throughout the day, taking the smaller stream that drained the Eastern side of the river, and at night they camped at a place called Golulu, which means "the changed land."

They rose with the daylight to resume their journey, but it was unnecessary, for in the darkness before the dawn, Abdul Hazim had surrounded the camp and, at the persuasive muzzle of a Snider rifle, Bosambo accompanied his captors ten minutes' journey into the wood, where Abdul awaited him.

The slaver, sitting before the door of his tent, on his silken carpet, greeted his captive in the Ochori dialect. Bosambo replied in Arabic.

"Ho Bosambo!" said Abdul, "do you know me?"

"Sheik," said Bosambo, "I would know you in hell, for you are the man whose head my master desires."

"Bosambo," said Abdul calmly, "your head is more valuable, so they say, for the Liberians will put it upon a pole and pay me riches for my enterprise."

Bosambo laughed softly.

"Let the palaver finish," he said. "I am ready to go."

They brought him to the river again, tied him to a pole and laid him in the bottom of a canoe, Arachi guarding him.

Bosambo, looking up, saw the Borrower squatting on guard.

"Arachi," he said, "if you untie my hands it shall go easy with you."

"If I untie your hands," said Arachi frankly, "I am both a fool and a dead man, and neither of these conditions is desirable."

"To every man," quoth Bosambo, "there is an easy kill somewhere; and if he misses this, all kills are difficult."

Four big canoes composed the waterway caravan. Abdul was in the largest, with his soldiers, and led the van.

They moved quickly down the tiny stream, which broadened as it neared the river.

Then Abdul's head man suddenly gasped.

"Look!" he whispered.

The slaver turned his head.

Behind them, paddling leisurely, came four canoes and each was filled with armed men.

"Quickly," said Abdul and the paddlers stroked furiously, then stopped.

Ahead was the *Zaire*, a trim white steamer, alive with Houssas.

"It is God's will," said Abdul. "These things are ordained."

He said no more until he stood before Sanders, and the Commissioner was not especially communicative.

"What will you do with me?" asked Abdul.

"I will tell you when I have seen your stores," said Sanders. "If I find rifles such as the foolish Lobolo people buy, I shall hang you, according to law."

The Arab looked at the shaking Arachi. The Borrower's knees wobbled fearfully.

"I see," said Abdul thoughtfully, "that this man whom I made rich has betrayed me."

If he had hurried or moved jerkily, Sanders would have prevented the act, but the Arab searched calmly in the folds of his burnoose as though seeking a cigarette.

His hand came out and with it a curved knife.

Then he struck quickly and Arachi went blubbering to the deck, a dying man.

"Borrower," said the Arab, and he spoke from the center of six Houssas who were chaining him, so that he was hidden from the sobbing figure on the floor, "I think you have borrowed that which you can at last repay. For it is written in the Sura of the Jinn that he who takes a life, let his life be taken, that he may make full repayment."

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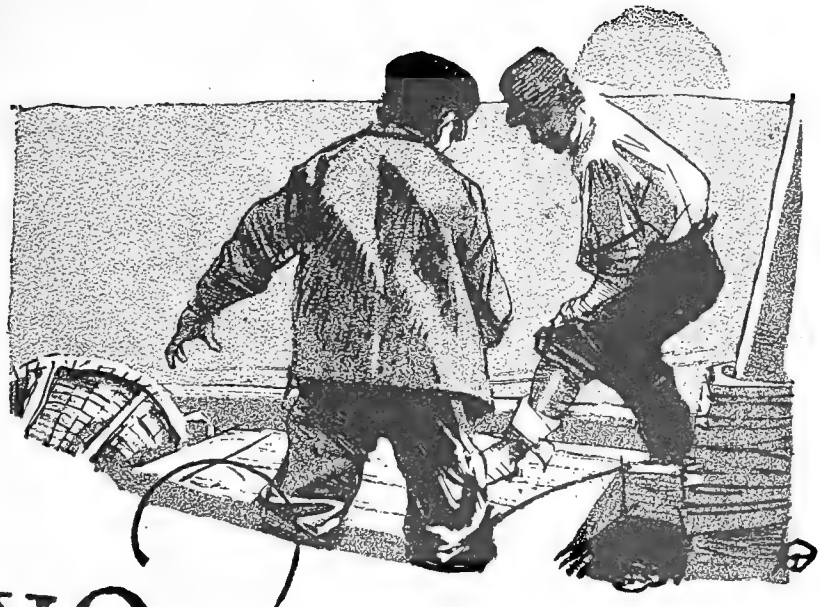

WO_2

by

Maurice Drake

SYNOPSIS—James Carthew-West, well born and once third officer on a West Indies liner, has become a wastrel, cruising about the south of England in his ketch the *Luck and Charity*, with a crowd of remittance-men and 'Kiah, his silent crew. His money gone, West is deserted by the remittance-men but not by 'Kiah. He gets so low he takes an odd job of ferrying for Leonard Ward—a quiet capable chemist teaching in Birmingham, Miss Lavington and a young woman named Pamela or "Pamily" Brand—quick-tongued, impudent, intelligent, who scolds Carthew-West for his shiftlessness. Carthew-West, with his ketch, is employed by Prof. Ward to carry cargoes for a trading-company exporting various cargoes from England to Terneuzen, Holland. He hires as extra-hand Austin Voogdt, a London newspaper-man, who has taken to an outdoor vagabond life to cure himself of tuberculosis. The manager at Terneuzen, Willis Cheyne, always insists that they take back to England as much mud-ballast as possible. The whole business mystifies Carthew-West and Voogdt, especially Voogdt, for the cargoes they carry are almost valueless commercially. Apparently Cheyne is cheating Prof. Ward, yet Ward seems a most capable man. At the beginning of the Winter, Voogdt leaves the boat, giving no reason.

CHAPTER X

"WHO ARE THESE MYSTERIOUS GERMANS?"

JUST as he had come from no one knew where save a tramp or two, so Austin Voogdt was off again, no one save him knew where. He shook hands with me in parting, and went on deck of the *Luck and Charity*.

I heard him shout to 'Kiah and say he was off on a holiday, then his footsteps went over our plank gangway and he was gone. I had shipped him on a quayside without warning, and found him a good man throughout, and now I lost him in the same way on another quayside, and missed him more than I can say.

We took road-metal from Guernsey. It really amounted to a trip out and back in ballast, but Voogdt wasn't there to jeer, and I felt too low-spirited at his loss to think much about it.

I shipped an Islander in his place, a man by the name of Rance, a pilot who had lost his certificate. He was a smart sailor, but a quarrelsome little brute when in liquor, and as he drank heavily in port—which

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was, I suspect, the reason for his losing his ticket—we were no longer the happy family we had been.

The first night he came aboard he had a violent row with 'Kiah, and his strident snapping and squabbling drew me forward to see what was the matter. Looking down through the companion I could see them both by the light of the hanging lamp. 'Kiah was in bed trying to sleep, his blankets drawn above his ears, and the new hand, a rather bow-legged little beast with an enormous mustache, stood in the middle of the fo'castle rating him in French and English and Guernsey patois mixed.

"*Cochon!*" he yelled. "English pig!" But still 'Kiah lay inert. "You English pig! You dir-r-rty Topsham dab!"

Why the name of his birthplace should have roused 'Kiah I can't tell, but it did. He put one bare leg over the side of his bunk and blinked at the gesticulating figure before him.

"You say that again!" he demanded.

"Dirty Topsham dab! I will say eet twenty times. Dir-r-rty Topsham——"

'Kiah moved as slowly as a bear, but in his sluggish way he was immensely strong. He caught Rance by the feet and the man was on the floor on his back in an instant. Then, in a short shirt and nothing else, 'Kiah started to climb the ladder, dragging his adversary after him by his ankles. When he had got him on deck, open-mouthed and staring, I thought it time to intervene.

"What are you going to do with him, 'Kiah?" I asked.

"'Eave 'm auverboard," he said stolidly.

"You mustn't do that, man."

"'E caaled me a 'dirty Topsham dab,'" said 'Kiah placidly.

"Well, he doesn't know any better," I told him. "Now you've got him on deck, kick him down into the fo'castle again, and tell him we don't allow quarreling on this boat."

'Kiah did as he was told, and Rance, stupefied with sheer funk, behaved comparatively well henceforth. But as he always got drunk in port, and could only talk obscenity at sea, I missed Voogdt the more for his detested presence.

THE Winter trade in the Channel was no joke, and threading the shoals off the flat Dutch coast was worse. But we were well clothed and fed and earning good money and, remembering the last Winter, when we had caught flukes and colds, neither 'Kiah nor myself felt inclined for grumbling. Cheyne showed himself desirous of our comfort. Our cargoes were lighter, a couple of additional men were hired at Terneuzen to help get extra ballast aboard and we helped ourselves at will to as much coal as we wanted from the Company's stores.

But it was a cheerless business, all the same, picking our way down through the Flemish Banks from the Scheldt to Dover in northerly weather.

Nothing happened. It was just one dreary, cold, wet voyage after another, with an occasional spell of idleness, waiting for the wind to shift or lull in our service. I even began to welcome the idea of reaching Terneuzen and having a decent meal and a talk with Cheyne at the end of each voyage.

"That's a new man," he said, when he first saw Rance. "Where's that long, lean Cockney of yours gone?"

"He jumped ship in St. Peter's Port."

"Where's he gone?"

"I don't know," I said. "When he joined, he said he might ship south for the Winter."

"I don't like changing men," Cheyne said, which rather surprised me, for I hadn't given him credit for that much decency. "What's this chap like?"

"I don't care for him. He's a sailorman, though."

"Oh, is he?" said Cheyne, and later had him ashore and gave him a drink or two.

After that Rance always spoke of him with great respect:

"A tr-rue gentleman, Mr. Cheyne!"

A good job somebody thought so, but, as I say, I was glad of the man's company myself at that time.

We made pretty much the same round of voyages as we had been making through the Summer; in and out of bleak, cold little ports, now deserted, which had been gay with Summer visitors when we had seen them last.

One visitor seemed loath to leave the South Coast, though, and that was Ward. I hadn't seen either of the two girls since Miss Pamily boarded us at Dartmouth, but Ward came aboard two or three times. Even in the Winter he paid us a visit or two, and the more I saw of the man the

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better I liked him. It seemed a pity he should take so much interest in such an obviously rotten affair as this company; but it was none of my business to say so.

Besides, I had enough business of my own to attend to, Winter coasting. Thrashing up and down Channel with head winds or fair winds, or sometimes lying becalmed through the short chilly days of Winter, I got very sick of the coasting-trade before January wore along.

ONE day early in the new year as we were entering Terneuzen we found a big galiot, of Dutch build but under German colors, lying at anchor about a mile down the river-bank from our headquarters. It seemed a queer place for such a boat to anchor, and when we got ashore I asked Cheyne what she was doing there.

"You'd better board her and ask," he said rudely. "I've enough to do, minding my own business."

Next day there was no reason to ask. The people aboard were broaching her cargo, apparently of deals, and floating them ashore. Cheyne got out a pair of very fine glasses he had and spent most of the morning watching them, and in the afternoon he went for a stroll in their direction.

"Do you know any German?" he asked me next morning.

"A few words."

"Then knock off for an hour and see if you can find out what those chaps are about down there. Looks to me as if they're bringing some sort of portable house ashore, but I can't understand German, and can't make head or tail of what they say."

I went down, dirty as I was, and fell in talk with the skipper of the galiot, a German Frieslander from Delfzyl. His cargo was building-material, but he didn't know what it was to be used for, so after a chat I went back to Cheyne's office, not much wiser than I went.

"What is it?" Cheyne asked. He tried to make the question sound casual, but he was obviously ill at ease.

"Building-material," I replied. "Deals and corrugated roofing principally. There are a lot of sheets of heavier iron plating, like boiler-iron."

"Yes—yes. I saw that myself. But what's it for?"

"The skipper didn't know," I said.

"Or you couldn't understand his talk?" Cheyne sneered. "I thought you said you understood German. I wouldn't have wasted your time like that if I'd known you didn't."

"I can talk it better than you," I said, inclined to lose my temper, like a fool.

"That don't say much. I told you I couldn't speak the language at all. Now, come on; get that stuff out of her and don't stand jawing here."

Our next trip took us to Penzance, and we were away ten days. I've good cause to remember it, for it was very near being my last trip for the Axel Trading Company. When we got back to the Scheldt the galiot had gone, but another vessel was moored in her place, and ashore the deals and iron were materializing into one small shed and two larger ones.

Cheyne was fidgeting about like a cat on hot bricks, and when I asked him what the sheds were for he fairly snarled at me, all pretense to civility gone:

"Go and find out—you that talk German so mighty well. I don't know. Wish I did!"

"I'll find out fast enough if there's any one there in charge that knows."

"Do, do, there's a good chap." He changed his tone in a moment. "If you really can find out, I'll give you a fiver. I will, straight."

I EARNED the fiver easily enough, for there was no difficulty this time in finding out what the sheds were for. A young dapper German in charge explained in pretty good English that they were the new premises of the Delfzyl Handeln Gesellschaft, and would be opened for general trading-purposes at the end of the following week.

Cheyne almost foamed at the mouth when I told him. He wasn't particular about his language at any time, but I'd never heard him blaspheme as he did then.

"Well, what else can you expect?" I said, when he'd done. "If you're running a show like this you must expect competition. Good job for you they're a mile farther from the town than you are. That's one good thing in your favor. They'll get fewer callers than you do, for certain."

He turned on me, furious.

"What the —— do you know about it?

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In our favor? Why, you born flaming fool, you don't think our business is done over a —— shop-counter, do you?"

"I don't know how your business is done, and I don't care."

"Don't look as if you did, idling ashore here when you might be at your work. Get aboard, d'ye hear?"

"Look here, Cheyne," I said. "You say two words more, and I'll see if I can't manage to lay you out. You offer me a fiver to get you information, and when I come back with it you behave like the gutter-bred swine you are. I won't argue with you, and I won't go aboard at your bidding. You give me any more of your lip, and I'll unship your head."

My fist was just under his nose, and he drew back and apologized. Just as well for him, for I really had lost my temper for once. I naturally expected the sack, after that, and I determined if I got it that I'd kick him round his own wharf as a farewell, just to square up for past favors. However, instead of sacking me, he was a shade more civil than before, so I'd no reason to regret talking straight for once. But he never paid me the fiver, after all. In the excitement of the moment I forgot it, and when I remembered his promise we were at sea again and it was too late to bother about it.

For all his civility he was still uneasy in his mind about the new company. No one could help seeing that, and again I began to reconstruct my notions about him. I'd got it so firmly in my head that Voogdt's surmise about the gilded mug behind the enterprise was true that I couldn't understand why Cheyne should be so upset at a little competition. If he was the paid servant of an unprofitable concern it couldn't hurt him much and, knowing him pretty well by this time, I didn't suspect him of any such loyalty to his employers as to worry about their interests. I wondered whether he'd invested any money in the concern himself, but somehow couldn't think him fool enough for that.

He was, though. That afternoon, when he came aboard, he apologized for his language of the morning, and then admitted he was a shareholder.

"I lost my temper, Cap'n. I'm sorry. You must overlook it. Fact is, this new concern worries me. All my savings are in this venture, and naturally I was a bit upset to learn these other people were on our track."

I rather guessed he'd go on the bend. He was just the sort of chap to do that if he was worried, and sure enough he did. By the evening he didn't care a twopenny-curse for all the fools in Germany.

"We've got the start of 'em," he said. "Let 'em be as smart as they will, they can't alter that. If we shut shop to-morrow, I've made enough to go on with for a bit."

"Have you done well?" I asked carelessly, but he wasn't drunk enough for full confidences.

"Not bad. Not so badly," said he, and changed the subject.

Would I go over next morning to have another look round the new stores and see if I could pick up any more facts about them?

"What size are their sheds? What's in them? What sort of chap is the man in charge?"

I said I'd find out all I could, and next afternoon came back with a pretty considerable budget for him. He took me into the office, shut the door, produced a bottle of whisky and told me to fire away; and I told him all I could.

"THE two big sheds are fifteen paces long by about seven wide—say forty feet by twenty. That's as near as I could guess without its being noticed that I was pacing them out on purpose. They're about eight feet high to eaves and thirteen to ridge. The small one's half that size, say twenty by twelve. The man in charge is a clerk from the company's head-office at Delfzyl—a Friesland-er. Van Noppen, he's called."

"A smart chap?"

"He seems so."

"Any machinery there?"

"Didn't see any. Why?"

"What's become of that boiler-plating the galiot landed, then?"

"I asked him that, myself. He said it had been loaded again, for Ghent."

"He's a liar, then. I should have seen—— But go on. What's in the sheds? What's that ship brought down there now?"

"Some patent fertilizer or other—in bags. I couldn't see into the sheds. The doors were closed, but the sills were clean and there's no litter about, so I expect they're empty yet."

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Cheyne nodded approvingly.

"Skipper, you've got eyes in your head. Where's this chap Van Noppen living?"

"In one of the big sheds, I think. At least there's a stovepipe at the end of one of 'em. The windows are high up under the eaves and the little shed's got no windows at all."

"That's queer. A store?"

"I suppose so."

"Anybody there besides the manager?"

"Half a dozen lumpers getting bags ashore and piling them on the bank."

"Lumpers? You mean hands off the vessel?"

"No, I don't. They weren't sailors—not smart enough. Just clay-smeared shore-lumpers, like your lot here."

"Where did they come from, then?"

"Terneuzen, I suppose."

"I should have seen them pass here if they did. What did that galiot sail with?"

"Ballast, I suppose. I didn't ask. They couldn't get anything else from here, could they?"

"Are they—are they digging out a wharf—like ours?"

"They've made a start. The barrows and planks are lying about."

"What do they want barrows and planks for?" he asked sharply.

"They're wheeling the stuff across the bank and dumping it down the slope inside."

"Inside?"

"Yes, inside—inland. Away from the river. I suppose they've dumped fifty or sixty tons down over the grass on the inside of the bank. It's sliding out over the field behind the sheds."

"Now—what—the—deuce— is — that — for?" said Cheyne in a whisper to himself, pausing between every word.

Upset? He couldn't have looked more scared if he'd seen a ghost. I stared at him hard, and he did his best to resume the conversation. But I'd done talking. No need of all Voogdt's warnings to rush back into my mind; no need for me to warn myself that there was something fishy doing. Plain honest business—even unprofitable business—doesn't scare a man like that.

He cleared his throat and repeated the words in a more matter-of-fact tone.

"What's that for? I asked you."

"I heard you," I said.

"Oh, all right I thought you didn't. Something caught in my throat—sort of dryness. Want of a drink, maybe."

He laughed nervously and reached for the bottle.

"What do you reckon that is for?"

"What is what for?"

"Why are they throwing the mud on the inside of the embankment?"

"Where else can they put it?" I asked.

"Well—we ship ours as ballast, as you know?"

"Perhaps they've got more paying cargoes than ballast."

"Yes—yes. P'raps so. Very likely," said he, plainly unconvinced, and so I left him, wondering what on earth was up, and wishing more than ever that Voogdt hadn't left me as he did.

Whatever it was that worried Cheyne it didn't interfere with business. He was up bright and early next morning, driving away as usual at the ballasting. The wind was strong, nor'westerly, and he expected one of the other boats next tide, he said, so sent us off to drop down with the ebb.

"Anchor off Flushing, if you can't get out," were his parting instructions.

We had to anchor, the wind being almost dead ahead and a lumpy sea outside, and next morning I was waked by the hooter of the Harwich daily boat. It struck me they'd be getting a dusting, so I ran on deck to see her come in.

SURE enough they were getting it. The following run of sea made steering difficult, I suppose, for she was yawing about rather badly, and taking it green over her stern every now and then. Naturally there weren't many passengers on deck—I pictured them all mighty sick in their berths, and pitied the stewards—but two people, a man and a girl, were standing a little way apart in the bows.

For the moment the man reminded me of Voogdt, but as the steamer neared us he walked to the other side of the deck and I lost sight of him.

The girl, wrapped to the chin and wearing a fur cap or toque, waved a hand cheerily as she passed. I waved back, as one does wave to a stranger's greeting from a passing boat or train, and then went below to the warm stove, thinking she must be a hardy sort of girl to be on deck in such bitter weather.

The wind lulled in the day, and then

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shifted to the northward, so that we were able to get under way next morning, but we were past the West Hinder before her face came back to me as something quite familiar. Even then it took an hour of brain-racking before it came to me with a shock that she was Pamily Brand.

CHAPTER XI

A FIRESIDE-CORNER WITH MISS PAMILY

OF COURSE I made sure Pamily Brand must be going to Terneuzen, and did my best to make a quicker voyage in consequence. She'd annoyed me from the very start of our acquaintance, flicked me on the raw of my vanity, as it were, and I wanted a chance to get level with her. But besides that there was something interesting about the girl that occupied my thoughts, and, anyhow, to see her at Terneuzen promised some sort of a change from the usual sitting and drinking with Cheyne.

"I hate waste," she had said, and I had some notion of letting her see I wasn't altogether a waster. I won't deny her sneer had something to do with my going slow on liquor and cultivating a bank-balance.

There was very little else to interest one in the life, as things were. The Winter coasting-trade was a cruel business, and if it hadn't been that I was saving money fast I think I should have tried to break the charter and lay by in some harbor till the Spring.

But I was doing very well and, hideously uncomfortable though the cruising was, I still flinched at the memory of the Winter before. No more idling on an empty stomach for me, if I could help it. So I stuck to it, and 'Kiah backed me up in his stolid way, and we both took it out of Rance whenever he seemed inclined to get slack.

We were for Lymington this voyage, and even 'Kiah seemed ready for a grumble at the way I drove the pair of them. I forget now what we brought back; some fool cargo or another, for certain. Since Cheyne's outbreak I'd made up my mind that the ostensible trade of the Company was only a cloak for some other more profitable business—probably fancy smuggling of some sort, like saccharin, perhaps. I didn't know, and I didn't care.

Besides, that girl's face stuck in my mind, a little roundish oval with dark hair and fur all round. It struck me she'd look rather well, seen close at hand, in that get-up. Her big eyes and short lip seemed the right features for a merry sort of Winter picture. I'm no artist, but it seemed to me she was the sort of girl that suits a Winter landscape—with an outfit of furs and skates, and warm life in her face. Anyhow, she'd certainly be an acquisition to Terneuzen society, and I chevied the men and drove the boat all I could to get back there.

It was nearly dark and raining heavens-hard when we got off the Isle of Axel. The office seemed deserted, but I got the dingey overside and went ashore to report myself. The place was all locked up, so off I went to Terneuzen in search of Cheyne. As I expected, he was at the hotel by the locks—dining with his friends, up-stairs, the landlady said.

"What friends?"

"The English friends. The tall man and the two young *vroowen*."

"Ask him if he'll see me," I said, and the landlady departed, and presently called down over the stairs to say I was to come up.

I'd had a shave the night before and a pretty good washing with rain and salt water all day, and as for my guernsey and rough serge, they were clean enough, as such clothes go, so up I went.

IT GIVES you a queer feeling, intimate yet strange, to see a girl indoors and without her hat for the first time. They had a private room, only lighted by a fire on the hearth and candles on the table at which they sat. Miss Brand, facing the door, had the shaded candle-light on her face and her big eyes, as she held her head on one side to peer across the dim room. The man—Ward, as I had guessed—got up and shook hands, and the girls nodded pleasantly and gave me a good evening. Cheyne sat back lounging in his chair, his legs stuck straight out under the table.

"How d'ye do, Cap'n?" he said, condescendingly. "Didn't expect you to-night. Thought you'd lie in under somewhere till this blew out. You've had a rough trip?"

"Fairly so," I said. "It blew a bit, but

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nothing to hurt. The *Luck and Charity's* a stanch boat."

"Perhaps Captain West would like something to eat?" Miss Lavington suggested.

"I should. I haven't had anything since breakfast," I confessed.

They cried out at that, and shifted their chairs so that I could sit between Miss Lavington and Ward. The Pamily girl stared at me unwinkingly as soon as I came into the light from the candles on the table.

"What'll you drink?" she asked suddenly.

"Water," I said, and twinkled an eye at her.

Cheyne stared.

"You'd better have some spirits," he said. "You're wet."

"Water 'll do."

"I never saw you drink water before," said he, and Pamily Brand cut in with her usual downright air.

"What does Captain West drink as a rule, then?" she asked.

"Whisky, generally, isn't it, West? But he doesn't drink much, do you?"

For once I felt friendly toward the bounder.

"What do you call much?" the girl asked carelessly.

"I don't think I've ever seen him drink more than two glasses at a sitting, and weak ones at that."

He said it as though he intended to sneer at my unmanly habits. If he'd only known I felt like patting him on the back I expect he'd have changed his tune.

The girl said nothing, but went on staring at me curiously, with her head on one side, like an inquisitive bird.

After a pause, "You're wet," she said.

"Only a drop of rain."

She pushed back her chair, put her napkin on the table and walked round to me and felt my coat.

"He's soaking!" she announced.

Ward looked on with a smile on his post-office mouth, and Miss Lavington's eyebrows lifted wearily, yet amused, too, I thought. As for Cheyne, he grunted some sort of protest. I think he said I could go down-stairs and get a change. But the girl didn't take the least notice of any of them.

"Get up and go over by the fire," she ordered. "Take your plate with you. Take off your coat. Here."

She put it on the back of a chair before the blaze, and then stood over me with a stiff glass of whisky and water.

"Drink that," she ordered.

No good resisting. There really wasn't much sense in sending me to the fire, for I was wet rather than cold, having walked fast. But she had a whirlwind-way of her own it was useless to try and resist. Besides, thinking of her as the poor relation, I judged she didn't get many chances of bossing people about. So I drank the spirits, and very strong and good they were, and then sat obediently before the fire, steaming as I ate, with the rain from my hair running down inside the collar of my guernsey.

In a minute she noticed that too, and brought me her table-napkin to wipe my head and face on.

"Rather have a towel?" she asked.

"This'll do, thanks," and I rubbed my hair dry and went on eating till the plate was empty.

She refilled it, waiting on me, going to and from the table, the others handing her whatever she wanted, and while I ate she stood and held my glass.

When I'd done I got up, meaning to go. The other three were still sitting at the table, but sideways, watching me. We must have made a queer contrast: they clean and neat, the men in dark clothes and the girls dainty in their light blouses, all sitting dry in the steady glow of the candles, while I, in wet guernsey and sea-boots, dripped and steamed in the flickering firelight, eating like a starving man from the plate upon my knees, hungry as a wolf.

The Pamily girl took my plate as I rose.

"You'll have another glass of spirits before you go?"

"No, thanks."

"Yes, you must. And then go aboard and get into dry clothes as quickly as you can."

She filled another glass at the table and gave it to me as I stood before the fire.

I can't tell what it was made me break out as I did—the warmth and food after a day's hunger and cold had as much to do with it as anything, perhaps. Or maybe it was drinking strong spirits after some days of abstinence. Whatever the cause, it suddenly dawned upon me what awfully decent people they were. Anybody else would have sent their employee down-stairs to

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get dry and presentable before they talked to him, as Cheyne had wanted to do. But Ward and Miss Lavington had only aided their little spitfire of a companion to make me comfortable where I was. It came over me with a shock that I was really making my living by helping rob them, and on the impulse I spoke out the truth for once.

"LOOK here," I said. "I—I think you ought to know how things stand. He'll never tell you," and I nodded toward Cheyne. "This business here is all sham, you know. Your money's being dribbled away gradually in these rotten voyages. That charter I made with you, Mr. Ward—I as good as swindled you! I never thought you'd pay me the sum I asked. Why, it's twice the current rate of freights! And the cargoes aren't what they ought to be—I could carry twice as much as I do. Here, this last voyage: I go to Lymington in ballast—two shillings a ton allowance on it—and come back with thirty tons of unsalable rubbish. What goods can you expect to get at a village in the New Forest? And I've taken out ballast before now and been paid freights back here on road-metal—for mending a path nobody uses. You'll never make money that way. You're paying us to waste your capital for you. You—Miss Lavington and Mr. Ward, I mean—you're being robbed daily. It's only common honesty to tell you so."

For a few moments not one of them answered or moved. They might have been wax figures rather than men and women. Then Ward lit a cigar—and did it jerkily, I thought, just as a wax figure would move—blew out the match carefully and put it on his plate.

"What makes you think that?" he said very quietly.

"A hundred things. The rate you're paying me; light cargoes; the waste and want of economy everywhere. I've brought potatoes here—a quid a ton freight, from Dorset—and found Sas van Gent exporting them to Germany when I arrived. That's business, isn't it?"

Ward looked at Cheyne, who nodded and then turned to me.

"That'll do," he said.

I naturally expected he would rage, but he spoke quietly enough.

"You've proved yourself a zealous servant and now you can get aboard. We'll sack you in due form to-morrow."

"As you like. My charter lasts till June, but I'm ready to break it if Mr. Ward wishes. I've seen you rob him long enough," and I shuffled on my wet warm coat and ran back to the boat as fast as I could.

I didn't want to be laid up with a chill just as I must look out for a new job.

But it was to be a night of surprises. I got into my cabin and lit the lamp, and just as it was flaming up somebody coughed softly in Voogdt's old bunk. I pretended not to hear, changed into a dry shirt and trousers, and then pulled back the curtain suddenly.

"Come out of it, whoever you are!" I said.

The huddled figure under the blankets stuck up a pale startled face, half laughing, and it was Voogdt himself.

CHAPTER XII

VOOGDT BOBS UP FROM A TRAP-DOOR

"AUSTIN!" I cried. "How did you come aboard?"

"Hush," he said in a whisper. "Don't shout so, you bullock. Swam aboard—me, the consumptive invalid! Man, I'm nigh dead with the cold. Where on earth have you been till now? On the bend?"

"After a fashion. I've just got myself the sack."

"Tell us all about that later on. For the present, light the stove and get me something hot quick."

He got behind the curtains again, his teeth chattering audibly.

I guessed Rance might have some spirits, so went forward and woke him. As I expected, he had managed to get a bottle of Schiedam aboard by some mysterious drunkard's means, and I took it aft, lit the stove and made Voogdt a rank brew, disguising the taste with a double allowance of sugar. He drank it greedily, demanded more and got under the blankets again. After three glasses he declared that I'd saved his life.

"Can you talk now?" I asked.

"Yes. But you first. Tell us all about getting the sack."

I told him the whole story without interruption, but when I'd done he announced that his tale could wait.

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"First thing to be done is to hide me. Ward 'll be aboard in the morning, and neither he nor Cheyne must know I'm aboard here, whatever happens. Next thing is for you to apologize to Ward, and offer to stand to the charter. He'll accept, I fancy, but if he's nasty, insist as your right on working it out to the end of the twelve months. Understand that. At whatever cost you've got to stick to the firm like—like a bug to a blanket. But I must be hidden till you touch at your next port. Then I rejoin."

"Well, that's good hearing, anyhow. Where've you been all this time? South, for your health?"

"No, north. And I haven't been there for my health either, since you use that most apposite form of words. All the same, I've precious little to show for my journeying. And that's enough for now. Warmth—blessed warmth! I was nearly frozen stiff when you came, James. And now for sleep. Let me know where I'm to hide, when I wake."

He turned his face to the wall and was snoring before I got to bed, though I turned in immediately.

He was up before me, too. When I woke in the dim light of the Winter morning his bunk was empty. I whipped out of mine quickly, and just missed breaking a leg, for he'd pulled up a trap-door in the floor which gave into a three-cornered hole we called the after-peak. In the Summer we used to store milk and bottled beer there for coolness, but it was only about two feet high and I shouldn't have thought he could have got into it.

However, there he was, lying on his back and industriously pushing the rubbish it contained back into the less accessible corners.

"What are you doing?" I asked.

He didn't hear me, so I stirred him with my foot until he squirmed his face under the hole, and then asked again.

"Making a nest," he said, and grinned. "There's nowhere else I can go without being seen."

"But you can't stay down there till we fetch another port."

"I don't intend to try. I'm going to live in the cabin here and dodge below when anybody comes aboard. Meanwhile I shall read many books, Jem, and improve my mind, lest it get to be a sailor's mind, like yours."

HE PUT a spare mattress and blankets down the hole and soon had a chance of trying its capabilities, for, as he had prophesied, Ward came aboard the moment we touched the wharf.

I tackled him at once.

"I want to apologize for my behavior last night, Mr. Ward."

He took it very quietly.

"Very good," he said. "We accept your apology. Miss Lavington and myself were not disposed to make any bother about it. You're a bit overzealous, perhaps, and—you will please consider this as an order from your employers—we wish you to avoid further friction with Mr. Cheyne. We are perfectly satisfied with his management, and have no complaints to make about the way in which the business is conducted. I may say we are perfectly satisfied with your work as well."

"As long as you're pleased——" I began, lamely.

"We are pleased, I assure you. The—er—the conditions of our markets are not a thing you can be expected to understand. Very likely you thought you were opening our eyes to shortcomings last night, but I can assure you that all the company's transactions pass under my own eye. Light cargoes, for instance. There's this shallow river as a standing excuse for them. And there are other points you're not able to consider—the size of our customers' orders, and so on. I quite understand that it must seem queer to you, this small class of trade of ours done at the very door of a great market like Antwerp, but you know the old saying that where big businesses can live, small ones can do with the crumbs they let fall."

"I never heard the saying."

"Perhaps not. But it's true. We—we are even doing fairly well, since you seem anxious for our interests. Er—in fact I had proposed to pay you a fifty pound bonus at the end of the charter, if you were disposed to renew it. Are you prepared to go on with us?"

"I'm prepared, fast enough. But how about Ch—Mr. Cheyne?"

"Mr. Cheyne will make no objections. We'll regard that as settled, then. One thing more: Whatever you may think of our unbusinesslike methods, don't talk about them to anybody. To *anybody*, mind. Already some information about us

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must have leaked out, and now we've competition at our very door—this German firm. So hold your tongue. That's all."

"I'm very much obliged——" I began, but he waved me aside, and I went about my business of unloading.

In the afternoon a boy came down from the hotel with a note for me.

DEAR CAPTAIN WEST:
Would you care to join us at dinner to-night?
Yours faithfully,
ANNE LAVINGTON.

I went below to write an answer and found Voogdt with his body under the floor and his head up through the trap-door, reading.

"What's on?" he asked.

"Miss Lavington asks me to dinner this evening. I'm in sassiety, cocky."

"Curse," said he. "I wanted to have a chat. Don't go."

"Look out," I said. "There's somebody coming."

It was a lie, but I meant going, and couldn't stop to argue with him about it then. He popped out of sight like a hermit-crab into its shell, pulling-to the trap-door over him, and I sat on it on a camp-stool and wrote my acceptance, laughing to myself.

CHAPTER XIII

I PUT ON PARTY-CLOTHES AND GET PUMPED

I WAS glad I went, the evening being thoroughly enjoyable. For one thing it was a godsend to sit at table with decent women once more, and for another, Cheyne was savagely annoyed at my being there, though he did his best to conceal it.

Miss Lavington made a very good hostess in her sleepy kindly way. Her slow, lazy smile set you at your ease and banished stiffness from the very start. She was certainly a very lovely woman, and Ward was evidently very sweet on her in his reserved way, so that I judged they would be partners before long in a closer concern than the Axel Trading Company, if he had his way.

As for Miss Pamela Brand, all I can say about her is that she puzzled me. I misunderstood the sort of girl she was at our first meeting, and I don't profess to understand her to this day, any more than I can understand why Spring weather should drench you with cold rain one minute and set you steaming in hot sunshine the next.

I've read poets who compare a girl to April weather, showers and sunshine. You couldn't find a seasonable comparison for this one without dragging in every month in the year from sultry August to December ice. There was little enough artificiality about her. She never suggested hot-house growth. To be with her was like being in the open air. Even when she was quarrelsome it was only like a breeze on hilltops or at sea—something that made you laugh, even if you didn't like it over much.

She had plenty to say for herself, never fear, and entered into every topic of discussion, either seriously, or turning talk to laughter by nonsensical pretense to argue. She seemed very good pals with Cheyne, so that I had to remind myself that they were cousins, to explain their attitude. Mostly she was chaffing him, but in her quieter moods showed a deference to his opinions that I didn't care to see.

He liked her, no doubt, as much as he liked anybody, bar his own precious self; but I should be sorry for any girl that got sweet on him in earnest. He was no good, that chap, only I don't think women see such things as men do. And sometimes I thought the girl was inclined to be more partial to him than was for her own comfort. I hadn't got to the point of liking her myself, altogether. She'd got too long a tongue to please me. But I remembered her thought of me the night before, and I couldn't fancy any decent girl getting herself tied up to a chap like Cheyne.

All the same, you couldn't really judge her feelings from her manner. She was too up and down for that. A laugh one minute and a smack in the face the next was her way, and I didn't think she had a softer side to her nature. There was very little sentiment about that young woman. She was more like a noisy boy of eighteen than a girl of two or three and twenty.

Most of the talk was about business. Meeting as we did, comparative strangers with one common interest, there weren't many other subjects we could all touch on. After making an exhibition of myself the night before I couldn't well ask many direct questions, but the Pamily girl wasn't bound in the same way and she made me talk about my work no end, till I even got

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the notion that the candle-lights shining in her big eyes took the shape of question-marks. What ports had I called at since she came aboard at Dartmouth? How did I like the Winter trade? What sort of men did we employ?

I told her of Voogdt and how I'd picked him up at Exmouth, and she seemed very interested. Then Cheyne cut in.

"That's that black-bearded Cockney you had aboard? He was no class, was he?"

"A better man than you," I nearly said; but remembering how Voogdt had played the low Cockney before him, and his present mysterious ways, thought better of it.

"He was a better class man than he looked. He'd been on a newspaper before he went on tramp."

The other three looked, not at me, but at Cheyne, for enlightenment. He made a little shake of his head, as though he were denying something.

"No class," he said. "No doubt he managed to impose on the good nature of our friend here, but you can take it from me that if he was on a newspaper it was on some low job, driving a wagon maybe. I had him ashore and stood him a drink and had a chat with him."

I confess I felt offended at the cad contradicting me like that to my face. They were all so intent on what he said and so obviously disregarding me that just for a moment I felt out of it. I'd half a mind to tell them I'd just left the man in my cabin reading Loti in the original, but had the sense to remember Voogdt's injunctions as to secrecy.

However, before I could say anything or show my resentment, the exclusive atmosphere had passed and Pamela Brand was talking to me of something else, as agreeably as you please, and the others were backing her up in making me feel I was one of a family-party, rather than the stranger I'd felt a minute before.

ONCE or twice the conversation strayed from the one topic of business and cruising, but it always came back to where it had started. Either Cheyne was out of the game or else I was. I hadn't seen enough of shore-life lately to enter into the usual topics of the day, and once when I'd induced Ward to talk of Mason College and his profession of chemistry, Cheyne leaned back in his chair, yawning openly.

The two girls were well informed, though, and could talk of books or anything else. But, as I say, the conversation was bounded on the one hand by Cheyne's limitations and on the other by my own. All the same, I enjoyed it thoroughly.

Toward the end of the evening, the talk shifted round from coasting to deep-sea cruising and of course the Brand girl must know all about where I'd been. When I told her, Cheyne wanted to know what boats I'd been in.

"The D. W. I.," I said.

"What D. W. I.?"

"I only know one company of the name. The Deutsche-West-Indien Company."

"Oh! a German line. That's a swell company, though. What were you? Quartermaster?"

"I was third officer on their *Oldenburg* when I chucked the job at Kingston," I said.

That took Master Cheyne aback a bit. I wondered whether he remembered his blowing off about having been in Warbeck's. Ward and Miss Lavington looked at him with surprise—and again with that queer air of accusation. From their faces one would think he'd been remiss in something. But I hadn't time to take much notice, for the interrogation-lights were waking in the Brand girl's eyes again and she started another catechism. "Where and why had I chucked the *Oldenburg?*"

Of course that meant telling her all the yarn about Kingston and the earthquake, and when I'd done it was time to go.

They were all very nice, shook hands all round, and Miss Lavington hoped I'd join them again when next in port if they were there, and so on, and so on. But even so, there was something in their manner I couldn't fathom, and I came away with the notion that I'd left Cheyne behind me to undergo a heckling about something he'd left undone.

I had the feeling so strongly, walking back to the boat, that I went over and over the conversation as well as I could remember it, trying to think how I could have given him away. That was the feeling—that I'd let slip something to his disadvantage. For the life of me I couldn't think what it was. I'd certainly said nothing to lead them to think he was given to

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going on the bend pretty often, and I really knew nothing worse of the man.

It might have been a strange echo of my own thoughts that came from behind the curtains of Voogdt's bunk when I got down into the cabin.

"Well, have they pumped you dry?" were his first words.

CHAPTER XIV

NEW PUZZLES

VOOGDT asked me the same question once or twice next day, but for once I had an answer ready for him. Each time, "Somebody coming, Austin," sent him down below like a trap-door spider, and though I had him that way over and over again, and though he knew I was fooling him and cursed me for it, yet he never hesitated an instant, but even while he doubted me dived into his hole again and again. It was very evident he was extra-anxious to keep out of sight.

I resented his repeated question all the more because I felt there was some reason for it. After being so very glad to get Miss Lavington's invitation, it wasn't pleasant to think I'd only been invited to the dinner in order that they might pump me for information. It didn't seem the right sort of thing for such a fine girl to do. I hadn't thought it of her; and yet, in face of Pamela Brand's questions and those keen questioning looks I'd caught directed at Cheyne, I couldn't deny it looked as though they'd had me there for just that purpose.

Worrying wouldn't mend it, though, and so as usual I put the whole thing out of my mind and drove the work as hard as I could, in order to get Voogdt away from Terneuzen unobserved. Cheyne was down the day after the dinner-party, working as hard as ever, and a bit more civil to me—in consequence of the D. W. I. revelation, I suppose—so we took in a good thirty-two or three tons of ballast and got away to sea again early next morning without seeing any more of Ward and the womenfolk.

When we got clear of the shore, Voogdt was able to come up from his hole in the cabin. If 'Kiah or Rance came aft, he could hide in his bunk and, with the skylight shut down, the noises of wind and water outside would keep our voices from the helmsman, provided we spoke low.

"What a time you've been!" Voogdt said, when he'd dragged up his mattress and blankets and replaced the trap-door. "I thought for certain you'd get away last night."

"We got in a bit of extra ballast."

"How much this trip?"

"Thirty-three tons, I expect."

His face showed unbounded astonishment, eyes and mouth open.

"Why—why—— What on earth d'ye want that lot for? We used to reckon twenty a heavy load."

"We don't want it. That is to say, it's not necessary, of course. But, as you know, they want it cleared away."

"How much cargo last voyage?"

"Thirty-five tons."

"And now you're taking away thirty-three of ballast. It's mad—sheer lunacy. And it pays!"

"They say so, at all events."

"They tell the truth, then, for once. I know it pays—have spent my last Summer's savings and most of your loan just to find out that much."

"Where've you been?" I asked.

"In Birmingham and the surrounding district, poking my nose into other folks' affairs. And bar that one fact, that Ward and Miss Lavington are making money, I haven't got a penn'orth of information worth the having. How are they making it, Jem? That's what beats me. Not at this trade. We know that, don't we?"

"They say it pays."

"How can it? I've been into the thing like an auditor. I've gone over every trip we did last Summer; priced the cargoes, found out current freights, read up old market-reports and generally put the business through a sieve. And every voyage shows a loss—every single voyage. What d'ye make of that?"

"You must have got hold of wrong prices. They say it pays——"

"Oh, dry up,' he cut in. "You make me tired, you poll-parrot. I tell you I've been into the thing to the uttermost farthing. I've assumed them buying and selling in the best markets. I've allowed for the fact that they've no competition——"

"But they have."

It was my turn to interrupt this time.

"What competition have they got?" Voogdt asked scornfully.

"This German firm. Didn't you see

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their sheds about a mile or so below us?'

"How could I see anything, when I left Terneuzen by night and haven't put my nose outside this hole since? What sort of crowd are they? Tell me all about them."

I told him all I knew, and when I'd done he beat his forehead on the cabin table and groaned.

"That finishes it," he said. "I'm gone in—dead—done for. There's something in it, now, for certain, and I've spent hard money looking for it and can't find out what it is. Never call me a pressman again. Call me a—you're a sailor, aren't you, you lump? Call me a sailor, for the future."

"I'll call you a sailor when I've done with you," I said. "You've something more to learn first, though. You haven't tried this Winter cruising, deserter."

"And I'm not so sure I will, either," he said thoughtfully. "Where are you for this time? Newhaven? I've a good mind to borrow more money from you there, and jump the ship again."

"Don't do that," I said. "I'm sick of this lonesome cruising, and it's even a sort of pleasure to see your ugly mug again. Stay on. We'll keep Rance to help do the heavy work."

His eyes twinkled. "That's all right," he said. "But I may have to go, Jem, all the same. I must get to the bottom of this business, or I shall die of complicated interrogation-marks in my in'ards. This German firm settles it. They must be getting something out of the trade somehow. But for the life of me I can not see how it's done. Every voyage we did last Summer was a loss, I tell you. Get that into your head."

"How do you know they're making money, then?" I asked.

"TWO years ago Ward had a job at Mason College, worth three hundred a year. He lived in diggings and lived small. Miss Lavington was a bit better off, but not much. She and Miss Brand were both students at the same college. Her income—Miss L.'s, I mean—was derived from two steamers her father left her. The Brand girl had some small property as well, I believe, and they lived together, also in digs. Little Brand was then under age and your lovely Lavington was one of her trustees."

"Miss Brand was a student, was she? What was her line?"

"She was a student. Now she's a B. Sc."

"That little gutter-snipe a Bachelor of Science?"

"That very gutter-snipe. She's the brainy one of the pair. A budding suffragist, and leader in the forward march of womankind. Cheyne'll have a handful in her, by the look of it."

"What d'ye mean?"

"Well, they say that's to be an engagement."

"God help her, then," I said bitterly. "Go on, get on with your yarn."

"Where was I? Oh, about the money. Well, Ward's thrown up his paid professorship, and now holds a sort of honorary visiting-appointment, and Miss Lavington's sold her steamers."

"That doesn't sound like making money."

"That's the funny part of it. On the face of it that's what any casual observer would say. But they're just dripping with money, Jem. I've got behind the scenes, which used to be my business, and there I learn that Ward and his girl are investing money—big money—in dozens of concerns. To give you only one instance, they took up ten thousand quid of the Japanese Municipal Loan only last November. And the allotments in that loan were twenty-five per cent. of the applications. Those two between 'em had applied for forty thousand quids' worth of scrip! It's unbelievable, isn't it!"

"What other investments have they?"

"Not a thing—except as shareholders. And every investment they hold has been taken up since the opening of these tin sheds at Terneuzen. You take my tip, there's something devilish fishy in it. Big smuggling, think? We should surely have spotted that, shouldn't we? And now this German firm are on their track. It beats me. It beats me!" and he slammed his hand down on the table with a bang.

"Don't make such a row. D'you want Rance to come down to see what's the matter? Tell me more. Are they living in a big way?"

"No. In diggings, just the same; but they seem to make holiday all the time, as you see. Ward does his correspondence from the Birmingham office of the Company, a shabby hole near Snow Hill, giving on the railway-goods sheds at the back. There

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seems to be very little business done there; but I didn't bother about the place much. Only one queer thing about it, and that's the clerk in charge."

"What about him?"

"Well, he was reckoned one of the smartest men in the city, until he came a purler—gambling on 'Change. Then Ward took him on, and he sits in that office all day, doing nothing, apparently. I tried to make his acquaintance and was a sporty, devil-may-care, boon companion. He was as close as an oyster and cut me dead a dozen times. The Birmingham office itself isn't any size, and I thought the profits, would be more easily detected at the Terneuzen end of the business. In fact I still think the Snow Hill office is only a blind."

"Are the other two boats making the money?"

He shook his head. "I had one look at the *Olive Leaf*, and as far as I could make out she's on the same lay as we are."

"How did you find out where she was?"

"That was accident, I admit. Fact is, I —er—" he stammered and got rather red over it— "I may as well own up that I was shadowing Ward. He was constantly leaving Birmingham and I thought I'd find out where he went. A nice long chase he let me in for, too—all the way to Bo'ness, on the Firth of Forth, a bitter Scotch port, all granite and coal-dust. And the first call he paid was aboard the *Olive Leaf*."

"What was she doing there?"

"Fetching coal to Terneuzen. The same old tale, half-cargoes at high freights. At least I suppose they're high, for the boat's well found, and the men seem content enough with her. I couldn't find out what the freights actually were, for the skipper's a dour Scotsman, with a fine notion of minding his own business."

"And Ward? What did he do aboard?"

"That's more than I can say. I wasn't in the cabin with him and the skipper. But I hung about till the boat cleared the port, and then came back to Brum. She had nothing aboard but coals, though, I'll swear—unless the lumps were hollow and filled with saccharin or opium or such dutiable goods of value. Besides, that's nonsense. If there's smuggling going on, it must be into England, not out of it. No, it beats me. Here's the situation in a nutshell: They lose money on every voyage, and put away money all the time. How's it done? Tell me that."

"I suppose it's like the restaurant-keeper who loses sixpence on every meal he serves," I said. "He makes his profits out of the quantity."

"Don't be a fool. How do you really explain it?"

"I don't explain it at all, and I don't want to. I'm like your Scotch skipper; have a fine notion of minding my own business. We're doing well, they're doing well and everything in the garden's lovely. Why bother about it?"

"Because I was made that way, I suppose. I can't rest in the face of puzzles like this. And I will get to the bottom of it before I'm done—I will, mark you, or I shall bust. And now, sailor, hand me down 'Ramuntcho' from that shelf and then go on deck and 'tend to your business. I'm a passenger for once, and don't you forget it."

I hung in the doorway a minute.

"Is the Brand girl making money, too?" I asked.

"Dunno. I dare say—it looks like a family-party. But the lovely Lavington's the Catch of the Season. When next at Terneuzen I shall clip my beard and go ashore and make goo-goo eyes at her. Now go away. Loti's better company than you are."

CHAPTER XV

THREE GUNSHOTS

WE MADE a short voyage of it, and the first night in port, 'Kiah and Rance being ashore, Voogdt went on deck, and on their return greeted 'Kiah and announced his return to duty.

'Kiah grinned all over his face.

"Glad t' see 'ee again, Mr. Vute," he said. "'E—that there Rance—'e id'n' no comp'ny fer a man."

"You'll find me comp'ny enough," Voogdt announced. "I've a learnt a braave lot o' new naames t' caal 'ee by, 'Kiah. As for 'e—" he jerked his head Devonshire-fashion toward the fo'castle, where Rance was retiring— "us'll talk to 'e proper, in's own lingo."

He had a passage of arms with the Islander before twenty-four hours had elapsed, much to 'Kiah's gratification. I wasn't present officially, but some of the echoes of the

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strife reached the cabin and 'Kiah afterward retailed to me as much of it as he could understand.

"I d'know what they was a-sayin' of," he said. "Frenchy talk, 'twas. But Mr. Vute, 'e went for Rance, proper. Rance, 'e 'adn' nothin' t' say to un, after five minutes of it."

"So you've been upsetting the peace of the ship," I said at tea-time.

"That little beast. He's a pig, that—sneering at 'Kiah and his ways. 'Kiah's worth twenty of him."

"Was that it?" I asked. "What did you say?"

"Oh, just told him what I thought of him, and gave him a breezy sketch of his family and forebears. We sha'n't have any more bother with him in the future, I fancy."

HOWEVER, when we got back to Terneuzen, we found ourselves let in for a mild row. The man had made no complaint to me of Voogdt's behavior, but the day after we landed Cheyne came down to the *Luck and Charity* and said Rance had told him he would leave the ship.

"Let him," I said. "I don't want him."

"We don't like sacking men," Cheyne explained. "Besides, this Cockney hand of yours seems unreliable. He jumps the ship and rejoins at his own sweet will, while Rance is steady and sticks to his job.'"

"I can't allow any dictation as to the management of my crew," I said.

"No dictation at all, my dear chap. Only you see we want to have a name for fair dealing with our men, and both Mr. Ward and Miss Lavington dislike change. I don't even want you to sack your Cockney, but Rance says he'll leave unless he has an apology from him, and—well, I don't want Rance to leave."

"I don't want four men to work this boat," I said. "I admit Rance has been with me through the worst of the Winter, and I've no wish to sack him, but if he wants to go, let him go, and welcome."

"I'd rather he didn't go, I tell you," Cheyne repeated. "Of course you can run the boat with three hands. I know that. But four make things easier, and—and we're prepared to make you an allowance toward the pay of a fourth hand, if you'll keep him on."

"All right," I said, trying not to look surprised. "If you wish it, I'll tell Voogdt to apologize."

"Thanks. I shall be much obliged," said Cheyne, and departed.

Voogdt heard what I had to say in silence.

"Rum game, isn't it?" he remarked when I'd done. "But of course I'll apologize—I don't take my dignity seriously like that little animal. Call him down now and I'll get it over. And see here, Jem; when I've groveled, do the friendly and produce a drink. I'd like to know what hold the little swab has over Cheyne."

He apologized in due form—a genial, pleasant apology that any decent man would have accepted at once. Rance, like the ill-bred little beast he was, looked down over his nose and was stiff as starch, and Voogdt went all over it again, smiling. His repetition and my whisky made the peace in the end, and they left the cabin like brothers. In the afternoon I heard Austin arranging to stand the little brute a dinner at Terneuzen in the evening.

He was a wonderful chap. To see those two working together, Voogdt merry and affectionate, and to remember the snarling French I'd heard him serving out to the same man only a day or two before, was a revelation. His manner merged imperceptibly into that of the Cockney sailor whenever Cheyne made an appearance, and that evening when work was done it was a vulgar Jack-ashore, with no trace of good breeding, that passed the office going toward the town, arm in arm with his Channel Island mate.

He got back at midnight in a vile temper.

"My head!" he complained. 'Like a kettle. And I've got the hiccups. That vermin insisted on my drinking level pegs with him, and I'm half screwed. 'To bed, to bed, quo' sleepy-head.' . . . And all to no purpose. I've spent good money feeding a pig, and I shall have a ghastly head in the morning—and I don't believe he's got any hold over Cheyne, after all. I'm sure he hasn't. And yet Cheyne requests me to apologize to him and salve his wounded feelings, and offers to pay part of his wages if he's kept on. All of a piece, Jem—all mazed, crazed, dazed. All of it. Sleep, blessed sleep. 'Hush me, O Sorrow.'"

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All next day he was like a bear with a sore head, but I didn't trouble much about him, because the two girls came down to the wharf and paid me a visit, and I was put about to make them reasonably comfortable. Being cold on deck, they had tea in the cabin, which, with the stove alight and the skylight open, was bearable, if draughty. Both of them were as nice as could be, and their chatter and furs and scents made the bare cabin seem a very pleasant place for once. Ballasting had started, but it was flood-tide and the men were ashore, Voogdt having gone for a stroll and 'Kiah and Rance in Terneuzen marketing, so everything was quiet.

IT WAS a still, cold Winter afternoon without a breath of air, and as we sat at tea the only sound audible outside was the lip-lip of the tide against our wooden walls. Then we heard music—a big liner going up-river to Antwerp, a string-band playing in her saloon. While we were listening, three or four gunshots sounded in rapid succession somewhere down the river, and the girls wanted to know what they were.

"Somebody shooting duck or sea-gulls," I suggested.

"If it's duck, I've nothing to say. If it's sea-gulls, it's a shame. They're no good, dead," said Miss Brand, in her downright way.

"You don't object to shooting duck?"

"No sense in carrying sentiment too far. Man must eat. Besides, I like duck and green peas myself, though it's too early yet for them."

She laughed a little, and the talk went on in other channels.

It might have been half an hour later when somebody jumped aboard and came across the deck. I didn't recognize the step, but it came down the companionway and proved to belong to Voogdt.

"Beg pardon, Cap'n," he said, in his Cockney accent; "didn't know you wasn't alone," and disappeared at once. Ward came aboard soon after and, as it was getting dusk, the girls shook hands, said thank you very prettily and went off with him. I went forward to see if Voogdt was in the fo'castle and found him sitting on one of the empty bunks, looking pale.

"Are they gone?" he asked. "Yes? Good. I'll come aft."

He limped as he walked.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I've been shot, Jem. In the leg."

"Shot! How? An accident?"

"Useful sort of accident," he said grimly. "Here, lend a shoulder and help me down the stair. I've had a fright, I can tell you."

"How did it happen?"

"I WENT down to those German sheds this afternoon," he said. "Thought I'd like a look round and see what was doing. I walked down through the fields inside the embankment, and when I turned the corner of the sheds one of the doors was open. Inside was machinery—a big press, among other things—and in one corner two-three men were making and laying concrete. I thought they didn't seem over pleased to see me. But I did the low-down foremast-hand and asked if I could get a job there.

"The man in charge—was that the one you saw? Young and clean-shaven? Fair? . . . That's the chap, then—said he couldn't give me a job, and I was rather put to it for an excuse to hang about. However, I did, most barefacedly, and asked this man what the machinery was for. Agricultural machinery, he said. I suppose he took me for a sailor, and thought I shouldn't know.

"Like a fool, I said—in German, too, 'What use is a heavy-weight press to a farmer?' And he told me it was for packing hay. I just had sense enough to see I'd made an abject ass of myself, so I didn't comment on the concrete—which I'll swear was being laid as a bed for the thing—but said, 'Oh, yes,' as if convinced, and started to walk home. That was about an hour ago."

"Well?" I said.

"Well! Listen, and tell me if it's well. I'd got about a couple of hundred yards along the bank and was walking along with my head on my chest, puzzling over that press, when suddenly I thought I heard somebody smack a whip away behind me. At the same time a bee flew by, with a rather shrill buzz. Thinking hard as I was, I took no notice. Then the whip smacked again and another bee flew by, and all at once I tumbled to what was going on and jumped over the embankment down among some cows at pasture. Oh! the sweet smell of cows, Jem! The dear beasts!"

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"I don't understand you," I said.

"My son, the third bee touched ground by my foot, hit up a splash of gravel and sang off over the river with a note I haven't heard since Pieter's Drift; and the fourth bored a hole through the calf of my leg as I jumped. If it had touched bone I shouldn't be here now."

"What?" I said, startled. "D'you mean ——"

"I mean they were out to kill," he said. "Man, think of the barefaced deviltry of it. Daylight, our sheds here within a mile, and out in stream a C. P. R. liner going up to Antwerp with a band playing. I could hear the tune distinctly. It's a serious business that makes men risk their necks like that by light of day, alongside one of the biggest highways of Europe.

"If they'd broken my leg and brought me down, I should have been buried in Scheldt mud to-night, and no questions answered. As it was, the cows saved me. Even as I jumped I thought that out. A dead man's easily moved, and who's going to ask after one missing 'foremast Jack' more or less? But a dead cow's another matter. If they'd shoot a man for asking a single question, they wouldn't do anything that would bring indignant farmers asking hundreds more round their agricultural sheds."

"How did you get home?"

"Drove the herd this way, keeping carefully in the middle of them—not so easy a business as it sounds, either, especially with a hole in your calf, and the cold fear of death on you. My word, but I was a frightened man, I can tell you. And now —now—now—we come back to the old question, rendered much more anxiously, 'What is it all about?' "

"But you don't think this has anything to do with the Company, do you?"

"I'm positive it has. How, I don't know. But when you get two abnormal things both happening at one spot, you can't help connecting them. I'm too badly scared even now to think the thing out properly, but I'll swear that the same cause underlies both Ward's investments and the hole in my leg. And now this is where you come in, at last, you who refuse to meddle. Ward's investments aren't your affair, you say. Are flying bullets your affair?—the attempted murder of a member of your crew? Besides, who's to say you yourself won't be the next? You're in just the same employ as I am; you've been messing round those sheds making inquiries, just as I have. I tell you, Jem West, it may become your business—your vitally important business—before you expect."

I RAN my hand up through my hair, puzzled as a man could be. I didn't know what to say; the whole thing sounded so impossible. For a minute I was half inclined to think Voogdt had illusions or had been drinking, but one look at his serious face dispelled that idea, and moreover there was the blood-stained bandage round his leg, incontrovertible evidence.

"Was more than one man firing?" I asked.

"I didn't look back to count," said he dryly. "But if there was only one he had a magazine-rifle, for the firing was too quick for anything else. It's wicked, isn't it? Now I'm recovering from funk I'm getting in a rage about it. The cold-blooded wickedness of the swabs!"

"It is a bit hot," I admitted. "What are you going to do? Tell the police?"

"You bet I will. If there's law in Holland I'll go for 'em. And yet——" he stopped.

"Yet, what?"

"I don't know. I'm thinking. Go and wash off any blood that may have dropped on deck. I'd keep under cover as much as possible if I were you. Meanwhile, say nothing to any single soul about it. This matter requires deliberation."

I searched the deck with a lantern and a bucket of water, and found and washed away a few stains. There were some on the companion-stairs as well, which showed he must have been bleeding fast, for he hadn't been on them more than a very few seconds. More than ever I was puzzled, and rather scared too, and inclined to get angry as one does when frightened.

I was all for laying an information with the Terneuzen police at once, and I couldn't see any reason for Voogdt's delay.

'Kiah and Rance came aboard as soon as I'd washed the deck clean and, the ebb clearing the banks, we had three hours' work before I could talk to Voogdt again in private. He came on deck, concealing his limp, and did his work at the hand-winch without remark. When the rising tide sent us aboard I went down after him into the cabin.

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"Shall I go to the police?" I asked.

"In a minute, if you want to. But sit down and smoke for a bit. I want a talk with you."

"Talk ahead," I said, and filled a pipe.

He hummed and hawed a little over his tale, but eventually got it out that for his part he'd rather not have the police called in.

"I'm shy of asking it," he said, "because I'm asking you to risk your life, and that's the plain truth. But see here, now. If you fetch them to meddle here, matters won't end with jailing the men who tried to shoot me. There's something big behind this—big and dishonest. Before you know where you are, our people 'll be in the dock with their German competitors, and Cheyne and Ward, and perhaps the two girls, may all smell the inside of a Dutch prison. Would that please you?"

"No, it wouldn't. Not but what it 'd do Cheyne good, maybe!"

"Exactly. Well, that's the only real reason I can give for keeping the police out of it. On the other hand, we may be risking more lives than our own if we don't inform. That's the deuce of it—we're working in the dark. And that's what really is influencing me, Jem. I won't be beat by these people. They're all in it—from the little Brand girl to the son of a gun who fired at me this afternoon—and I'm out of it, and I hate the feeling.

"Here I've made myself conversant with this trade at both ends. I've shoveled their mud and audited their accounts, and I'm still gaping at the business like a fool, unable to see where the profits come in. D'you think I want to call in a fat-headed Dutch policeman to tell me what I ought to have found out for myself long ago?"

"Speaking for myself, I'm more afraid than curious."

"On my honor, I don't believe I am," he said. "Oh, I'm afraid, all right—I was in a horrible funk this afternoon. But curiosity's eating me alive.

"What is it? What is it in this trade that allows Ward to bank money in thousands and incites a German trader to risk hanging? I'm in it up to my eyes. I've got the Axel Company's grime on my hands and their pay in my pockets and their competitors' trade-mark on my leg, and here, in the middle of it all, I can't see how it's done. And I will!"

He almost shouted it.

"I will. I'll get to the bottom of the business if I've got to run through storms of cursed bullets. No police, Jem. Hang the police! I'll find out what the game is if I spend half my life at it. And then, my noble captain, we'll go into it ourselves —you and I. That'll hurt the thieves worse than anything else, I'll swear!"

CHAPTER XVI

HIS MAJESTY'S TORPEDO-BOATS

WE HAD no sleep that night, either of us; Voogdt because of his excitement and the pain in his leg, and I because he kept me awake, arguing the matter to and fro until the morning-ebb, when we turned out, got the last of the ballast aboard and put the hatch-covers on. At first I was inclined to treat the whole affair as an accident, but Voogdt convinced me, as he had a way of doing, and by daylight I had come round to his opinion that it was a delberate attempt to get him out of the way.

Not that I was persuaded so much by his words. It was his evident anger and fright that weighed with me, for I knew it took a good deal to scare him in earnest.

I was so thoroughly convinced by the morning that when two figures came marching down the bank from the German sheds I proposed to be ready to resist an armed attack.

"Pooh!" said he. "What nonsense! They've come to explain the matter away. You say nothing. Leave it to me."

When they reached the wharf they hailed us, and asked if they might come aboard. The taller man, whom I recognized as the manager, Van Noppen, had a little gun in his hand, and with him was a hobbledehoy youth with a broad cheerful face, dressed in the clay-smeared clothes of a lumper.

When they got on our deck Van Noppen led off with abject apologies in English.

"Dis young fool here—" he indicated the boy at his side— "he has yoost bought a new rifle, an' yesterday afternoon he must start shootin' at a paper target, de fool. He nefer looked to see vhere his shots vass gone vhen dey hat gone t'rough de target. One off your men vass on de bank an' I see him yoomp away off it. I hope he vass not hurt."

I looked over my shoulder as though

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beckoning Voogdt, and he came to my assistance.

"'E wos, though," he said truculently. "'E was shot. In the leg. Look 'ere." He pulled up his trouser-leg and displayed the bandage. "Nice thing, thet is. Shootin' blind an' large. 'E might 'a corpsed me. A bloomin' nice thing, I call it."

"He is very sorry," Van Noppen said, but Voogdt was not to be appeased.

"Sorry! Thet's a lot o' good, ayn't it? Thet'll mend my leg, won't it? S'pose I gets blood-poisonin', an' 'as to lay by an' loses my job." He turned to the boy and abused him in such execrable German as foremast-hands pick up in the ports and then turned to Van Noppen again. "I'll 'ave the law on yer both."

Van Noppen shrugged his shoulders. "The law? Oh, yes. But how vill that do you good? If any leedle compensation——"

Voogdt cut in.

"Compensation? Oh, yus, I don't think. 'Ow can 'e pay compensation?"

"I haf no doubt our Company vill make him an advance on his vages," Van Noppen suggested.

"Then I want a 'undred quid. One 'undred pounds. Savvy?"

"But that is reedeeculous," Van Noppen said placidly. "A pound, yes—or two. But a hundred for a leedle accident is foolish talk."

I STOOD back and let them squabble over the sum, Voogdt playing the half-angry, half-frightened foremast-hand to perfection, and Van Noppen quietly persuasive. If Voogdt's strident accents hadn't been a constant reminder that he was playing a part I should have been less interested.

As it was, he had so convinced me that I seemed to be looking on at a play. The German clerk, well-clad and businesslike, with the silent sheepish lumper at his side, only filled me with suspicion, and their argument, all about money-compensation, seemed a thin veneer of civilization over some hidden abyss of savagery. I almost expected Van Noppen to bring the rifle to his shoulder and shoot one of us on the spot and, half unconsciously, put out one hand toward the weapon.

He handed it to me at once and went on talking to Voogdt, while I examined the weapon with curiosity. It was a little Belgian rook-rifle, such a cheap toy as is made for export at about half a sovereign. I opened the breech, looked through the barreal and was idly sighting it out across the water when Van Noppen appealed to me.

"I ask you, Captain. I offer feefty pounds to your man. Ees it enough?"

"I should take it, if I were you," I said to Voogdt. "You'll very likely get nothing if you go to law, you know."

"Aw right, sir," he said. "If you sye it's aw right, I'll take it. 'And it over," he said to Van Noppen.

The money in notes was immediately forthcoming, and I saw that the bundle the German returned to his pocket was far larger than the sheaf he handed to Voogdt. Their business being concluded Van Noppen held out a hand for his rifle, but Voogdt made a gesture to restrain me from returning it.

"Thet bloke ayn't fit t' be trusted wiv a gun," he said. "I'll 'ave thet too—'e can chuck it in to make up the bargain. It 'll come in 'andy f'r shootin' gulls."

Van Noppen hesitated a moment, but finally handed over the rifle, with a box of ammunition which the hobbledehoy produced from his pocket, and the pair went ashore just as the *Luck and Charity* floated. Voogdt watched them start on their homeward journey and then handed the notes to me.

"The fifty I owe you," he said. "The hundred per cent. interest will follow later, I fancy," and before I could say a word he had gone forward and was rousing out the other two to help cast off from the wharf.

ONCE outside, the breeze fell light, and we drifted aimlessly. Off the Weilingen, Voogdt amused himself by bringing up the rifle and shooting at the razorbills on the water round us.

"Don't do that, you bird-killing Cockney," I said.

He wheeled round.

"Who's killing birds, you fool? I haven't touched a bird and I don't mean to. I'm trying the range of this kid's toy. I must have been over two hundred yards from the man who potted at me, and this fool thing won't carry half that distance!" He paused, looking thoughtfully out across the water.

"What a game it is," he said slowly. "Fifty pounds out of a laborer's pocket to

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salve the leg of a coasting-hand! It all points the same way. Cheyne talks of losses, while Ward is banking big money. Both they and the German crowd lie like steam and both are very anxious to avoid inquiry into their business. Cheyne doesn't like sacking men. Why? Because it means employing new ones. And the Germans try and shoot a man for asking a simple question, and then come and tell lies and pay up hard money to square it. Why, again? To keep strangers—the police—out of the way of their wharf. What other points have they in common, Jem?"

"Well, they both open tin sheds and do the same class of general trading-business in the same district," I said.

"That's true." He seemed to ponder on my rather obvious suggestion. "That's true. But why the secrecy, and the shooting? And where do the profits come in?"

"Beats me," I said briefly, looking over the side at the birds. As I watched, a tiny catspaw broke the glassy surface of the water like some one breathing on a windowpane.

"And here comes a fair breeze, so we shall have something better to do than sit here and cackle and vex our brains. Ease that sheet a bit, Austin, and then get a cup of tea."

After the first few puffs it blew steady, and by the time tea was over I had half a mind to take in the topsail. However, we were only for Southampton, and I thought that by carrying it we should save a tide, and very fortunate it was for us I did, for we had a bad scare before we rounded the Nab light-ship next evening.

Once past Dover we kept inshore and there was very little shipping in sight. Far out to the southward showed the upper sails of some four-master outward bound, and there were the usual trails of distant smoke one learns to associate with the Channel horizon. Three or four pilot-cutters were cruising about off Dungeness, and with them was one small steamboat, slowly doing the same aimless round.

She had the appearance of an old tug, being very shabby, and narrower in the beam than the great modern ocean towing-boats. I pointed her out to Voogdt and drew his attention to her shape.

"She'd be faster than the modern broad-breasted tug?" he suggested.

"Faster, yes. But a modern tug 'd pull, this one backward while she went full steam ahead."

"That 'd be funny to see," he said. "Suggestion for a *fête maritime*—tug o' war between two tugs. What's she doing here, think?"

"Brought down a crowd of Channel pilots to wait for upward-bound vessels, I expect."

That was about six o'clock. Past Dungeness we laid our course for the Owers light, and I went below to catch a short nap, leaving Voogdt in charge. At a quarter past eight I was waked by his usual signal—three bumps with his heel on the deck above my head—and went up the stair, yawning.

"WHAT'S the row?" I asked.

"Something's gone wrong astern of us," he said. "I saw the lights of a steamer there ten minutes ago, and now she's disappeared."

I got behind the wheel and peered out through the darkness—dark as the inside of a bag, it was—but not a sign of any steamer's lights could I see. The breeze had freshened and we were slipping along at a good rate, the sea just lively enough to give a pleasant rise and fall here aft. Shoreward, a blur of light on the sky showed where lay Brighton, but the town itself was below the horizon and not another light was visible.

"Are you sure you saw her?" I asked.

"Positive. Overhauling us, she was. I could see all three of her lights not ten minutes ago."

I stared again, but could make out nothing, and turned on Voogdt, rather annoyed.

"What d'ye want me to do?" I asked.

"That's for you to decide. I called you on deck for instructions. I tell you I saw her as plainly—— My God! She's on us! Shout! Shout!"

She was right on the top of us, no lights showing, and plowing through it like a liner. My heart went into my mouth, and we shouted at the top of our voices, hoarse with alarm, dragging at the wheel like maniacs. For one moment despair succeeded despair, for Voogdt lost his head and was shoving the wheel hard aport, to luff, whereas I saw our only chance was to wear ship.

He being at the wheel had the start of me and the *Luck and Charity's* bows had commenced to swing shoreward before I

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could tear the wheel from his hands and jam it over hard astarboard with all my force. We were just in time. The steamer went by us at a good ten knots, actually grazing our stern as she passed.

'Kiah and Rance were on deck, shivering in their shirts, by this time, and Voogdt cut short my abuse for his stupidity.

"Never mind that, now. We aren't out of the wood yet. Tell 'Kiah and Rance to pull on some clothes quick and come on deck again, top speed."

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"That was deliberate, man," he said excitedly. "Didn't you see their lookout? He was crouching in the bows. I saw his figure against that patch of light in the sky. They were trying to run us down! They may be back any minute, and here are we with all our lights to guide 'em."

He flung his coat over the binnacle and ran forward, extinguished the side-lights and was back in less than half a minute.

"We must get the dingey overside."

"What for?"

"To save my skin, since you don't seem to care about your own. Here's Rance. Take the wheel, Rance. You're lookout, 'Kiah, and keep your eyes open. There's a foreigner with his lights doused trying to run us down. Watch out, 'Kiah! You watch too, Rance. She may come round and have another try at us astern. Come on, West, bear a hand."

"You're mad!" I said.

"Very likely. Move, all the same."

I made some other foolish protest, but he wasted no words in answer, only disappearing into our cabin. When he came out he had a bundle of bluelights and rockets in one hand and the little rifle in the other. The bundle he threw into the dingey then brought the rifle to his hip, pointing straight at me.

"Mad I am," he said excitedly. "Call it so, to save time. I tell you straight, I'm mad enough to shoot even you, Jem, if you don't help all you can. You'll be dead anyhow, if that boat comes back! Come, help me with the dingey. That's better. Overside with her. Half a minute—a match. Now, over she goes."

The dingey floated away behind us, a mixed heap of rockets and colored fires sputtering and blazing on her bottom-boards.

"Now shout!" said Voogdt. "Shout like fury—at the top of your voice. Rance—'Kiah! Shout, men! Come back to the wheel, Jem. We may want to be extra nippy there in a minute or two. Now shout again."

We shouted together — again, and yet again—poor attempts to wake the appalling emptiness of the night. The wind caught our voices from our very mouths and whirled the cries ineffectually away to leeward. Astern the dingey blazed fainter and fainter as we left her farther behind, and then suddenly went out. Her last flare showed distinctly the bows of the darkened steamer that cut her down, and I admit I felt as sick as a man could feel.

"There goes our last chance," said Voogdt despairingly. "Stop shouting. It'll only help them to find us, and when they do, the game's up." He picked up the little rifle again. "I'll give that lookout a flea in his ear, though . . . What's that?"

AWAY to the southward a rocket leaped, pricking into the night like a red-hot needle.

"Thank God!" he said fervently. "Somebody's seen the flare. Send it's a King's ship. Get another blue light to show when we see 'em close, Jem."

It was a King's ship—four King's ships, in fact—torpedo-boats at night exercises. They came up hand over fist, and Voogdt answered their inquiries through our megaphone.

"Just been run into by a steamer goin' down Channel. Leakin' streams. One o' you stand by us so far as the Nab, will 'ee? We'm in a sinkin' condition. No, us don't want t' leave 'er."

The might of England, speaking through another megaphone, was reassuring, if scornful.

"What do you expect if you go barging about all night without lights?" queried a clear voice with acerbity. "You slovenly fishermen are the curse of the Channel."

Voogdt whipped his coat off the binnacle, and set about relighting the side-lamps. Since we were sinking, the voice went on, a torpedo-boat would stand by us, and did, taking no notice whatever of our shouted thanks when we parted company at the Nab light-vessel.

"A nice cheery trade, this," Voogdt grumbled as we bowled along past Spithead. "When they can't shoot you ashore, they try and run you down at sea."

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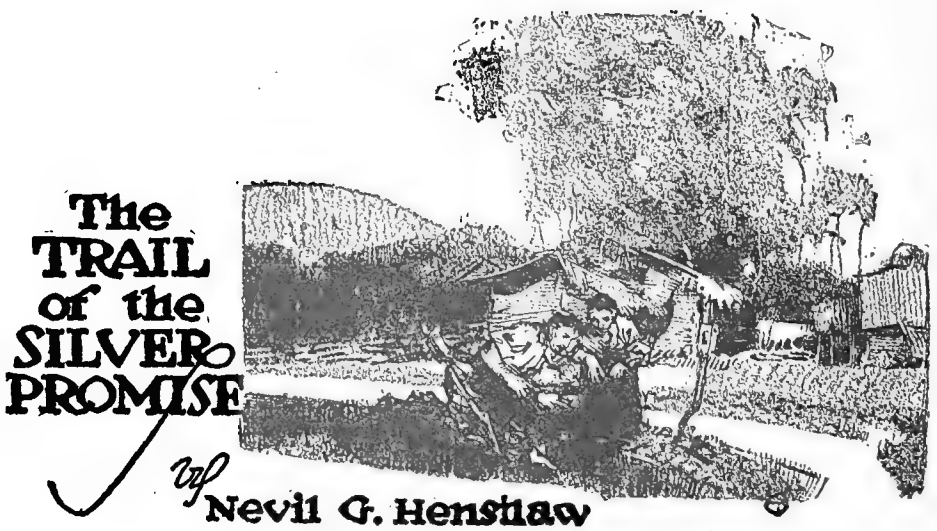
"You've got a bee in your bonnet," I said. "You don't think this has anything to do with the Terneuzen business, do you?"

"I don't know what to think. I've had two narrow escapes of my life in a week, and connected thinking is difficult under the circumstances. Anyhow, this last was a deliberate attempt, I'll swear. I saw that lookout-man against the sky as clearly as I see you now. And I'll tell you another thing: That indecision of ours at the wheel saved us. When that chap saw our bows swing shoreward theirs swung after us. If you'd wore ship as you wanted to without a hitch, they'd have followed us in that direction and cut us in two, sure as fate. Next time the *Luck and Charity* goes to sea she goes armed. I'll see to that. I tell you that was a carefully schemed plot to wipe us out. Why were they waiting for us at Dungeness else?"

"What d'ye mean?" I asked.

"Why, you blind mole, that steamer was the one you drew my attention to as being an old tug. Pilots be hanged! She was chosen for her old-fashioned build. 'What a narrow beam you've got, grandmamma. The better to chase you with, my dear.' And—what will they try to do to us next, I wonder?"

TO BE CONTINUED



WE HAD had an exceptional week of shooting upon the lower coast, the little hunchback Jean Le Bossu and I, and, being of a mind to try our luck still further, we had run back to Anse Le Vert for food and ammunition. Now, after a busy hour in the quaint Louisiana village, we had returned to our boat; myself laden with smokeless shells, Le Bossu staggering beneath his inevitable sack of supplies. Also there peeped from his pocket a small package carefully wrapped in white paper, at which the little man glanced occasionally with an air of quiet pride.

"It is but a gift—a little gift, m'sieu," said he in reply to my inquiring gaze.

"It goes up the Bayou Vermillion in charge of my friend Valsan. Also there is in connection with this gift a story. It deals with a search for treasure and, unlike the other ones that I have told you, its ending is a pleasant one. Perhaps you would like to hear it while we wait for Valsan and the tide."

And this is Jean Le Bossu's story of the gift.

IT BEGAN several Winters ago with the last illness of my friend old Alcide. This Alcide was a clever trapper, who surprised his companions each year with the

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number of his otter-skins. Seeing that all was over with him, he sent for me.

"Bossu," said he, when I stood at his bedside, "I have set my last trap, and it is my wish that you should succeed me. This season go up the Bayou Vermillion until, upon the left bank, you find a stream guarded by a blasted cypress. Back of that cypress is a marsh, and in that marsh are the otter. Work in secret and your success will be mine. If known, the spot will be barren in a month."

Thus spoke old Alcide and, once he was in the ground, I lost little time in carrying out his instructions. Otter, as you know, bring many times the price of our other skins, and in less than three days my traps and boat were in readiness. Then, as such a venture is ever better with four hands than two, I looked about for a partner.

In the end I chose Paul Renaud of the camp at Bayou Portage. He was a young man, tall and strong, and with an air of contentment that drew me toward him from the first. Indeed, it was rather for his good humor than for anything else that I chose him from among his more seasoned companions. Better a cheerful youth across the camp-fire than a growling elder, however expert.

We left next day and, making the Bayou Vermillion, picked up the cypress at dusk. With the first light the following morning we entered the stream, and, having found the marsh a mile back from the bank, prepared for the business of the expedition.

Our first few weeks were uneventful. We caught some otter and many muskrats, and of feathered game there was more than an abundance. Also we were not disturbed, since our marsh, though but a short distance from the bayou, was most carefully hidden. It lay in a little hollow, or depression, where the stream spread out into a bog, and upon three sides it was closed in by a dense growth of forest.

It was a spot to delight the heart of a trapper, yet there was about it none of that feeling of desolation which one experiences in the wild. Always, but a mile away, there was the busy life of the bayou, and often, when looking up-stream, I had caught a gray drift of smoke above the line of the forest. That it was not the wind-driven clouds of a camp-fire was evident. Its quiet steadiness spoke of hearth and home and the life that is within four walls.

As for my companion, he proved all and even more than I had hoped for. Quiet, industrious, quick to take advantage of each new lesson taught by the marsh, he was a very king of partners. Always there was the contented smile, the willing hand, the cheery voice across the fire. Thus he went on for many pleasant days, until Nature sought her usual payment of disaster.

IT WAS a trap that caused the mischief—a trap set the year before and forgotten by old Alcide. Finding a long-hidden and promising runway, Renaud prepared his stake, and reached into the grass to place it. Then there came a click, a snap, and the hand came back with the iron jaws bitten deep into the wrist.

Now the injury itself was but one of the usual accidents of our business. The trap was light, I easily removed it and, after he had bathed his wound with liniment, Renaud thought no more of the matter. Next morning, however, the wrist was badly inflamed, and by night the arm had swollen to such a size that Renaud was unable to sleep. By the following morning the trouble had declared itself, and he raved and fought in a delirium of fever. That some poison of rust or long-decayed bait had entered his blood was only too apparent. That I must act at once if I would save him was more apparent still.

It was hard to tie him, yet it was the only way, and so, having bound him securely, I placed him in our pirogue, and pushed off from our camp. At the bayou I paused for a moment that I might decide my course. To go down-stream and around the bay to Anse Le Vert was long, but there was the certainty of a doctor at the end. Up-stream lay the city of Abbeville, but that was still farther. What lay in between I did not know.

Then I thought of the smoke that I had seen above the tree-tops. That it was the least distant, that it spoke of life and human habitation, were beyond doubt. Surely I could do no better than seek the nearest aid.

Bending to my paddle, I passed for a time between low, thickly wooded banks, and then, with scarce a thinning of the trees, there came into sight my goal. It was a farm, a broad, generous farm that had been snatched from the very heart of the forest. Upon two sides the unbroken

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line of trees frowned down upon the level acres, and in the rear the fields stretched away to a far distant line of prairie. In front was a little landing, ending in a grassy path that led back to the low gray farmhouse amid its grove of oaks.

THIS much I saw from the edge of the forest, and then, as I came closer, my eye was caught by a figure upon the landing. It was that of a girl, and at my approach she withdrew the line with which she had been fishing, and came forward to meet me. She was a small, slim girl, beautiful with the rare beauty of our kind, and about her there was much of the sweetness and freshness of her woodland home. Her dark eyes were alight with the joy of living, yet as I swung alongside they quickly clouded with concern.

"What is the matter, m'sieu?" she asked. "He is injured?"

"Badly, mademoiselle," I replied. "I am in search of aid."

"I will call my father," said she, and sped up the path.

She was back in a moment, and with her hurried her father and two laborers called from the field. As for the father, he was one of those huge, red, prosperous creatures that are born of many generations upon fertile land. Added to his weight there was a certain air of importance, as of one long accustomed to good fortune and command, yet it needed not his words to tell me that his heart was kind.

"*Dieu*," he gasped out in a thick, throaty voice. "He is indeed bad, since you have had to tie him. Up with him and into the house, you two, while you, Loisette, run ahead and make ready. As for you, little man, you can go into the trouble while I get my breath."

I began to explain the accident and the immediate need of medical aid, but before I had well started the big farmer clapped me upon the shoulder.

"Have no fear," he assured me. "You are in the hands of Boniface Antoine, which, if you know anything at all of this bayou, should be enough for you. As for a doctor, there is one at the village upon the prairie. A fast horse, a messenger, and the trick will be done by noon."

At the house M'sieu Antoine was solicitude itself, seeing Renaud to bed, and afterward assisting his daughter with the simple remedies that she had prepared. Then, when all was done and there was naught left save to wait for the physician, he took me out upon his wide front gallery, bearing glasses and a bottle of the red wine of old France.

"Come," said he. "We will drink to the quick recovery of your friend. Then you must give me the news outside. We are lonesome here at Silver Promise, despite the passing craft, and visitors are always welcome. They are the only newspapers I have."

I explained that, having come from even a more lonesome spot, I had no news, although, as I soon found out, this mattered not at all. True, M'sieu Antoine wished for talk; but only for talk of his own! Once started, he went on without ceasing, telling me of his farm, which had been in his family since the original Spanish grant; of his wonderful crops of corn and cotton; of the positions which, when younger, he had held in the parish. In another it would have savored of boasting. With him it seemed rather the outburst of a great, generous heart that sought only to share its contentment with another.

"So, m'sieu," said I, when he finally paused for breath, "you have indeed been fortunate. Surely life can give you no more."

M'sieu Antoine shook his head.

"There is always ambition, my friend, and I have mine," he replied. "Perhaps I should be satisfied with Silver Promise, yet I will never be satisfied until the promise is fulfilled."

"You mean?" I asked.

By way of reply M'sieu Antoine entered the house, returning in a moment with something which he placed in my hand. Looking at it, I saw that it was an ancient silver coin, large and thick and worn bright from much handling.

"Well?" I inquired, as I handed it back to him.

M'sieu Antoine gazed at the coin for a moment, while the lines of puzzlement bit deep into the smoothness of his brow.

"That is what I changed the name of this place for," said he. "Always up to my time, it had been called Antoine's Farm. Perhaps I did wrong. I do not know. But Silver Promise it will remain until, through the fulfilment of the promise, the old name comes back once more.

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"AS FOR the story," said he, "it is told in few words. My father, like myself, was a man of great size. With such people any sudden excitement is dangerous. Often it is followed by a seizure—perhaps a fatal one. Thus, as I seek to do myself, my father led a quiet life until the time when I was of age. Then, as I talked one day with my mother, he staggered up to this gallery like one spent with fast running. His face was suffused with blood. His breath caught in his throat. Falling at the bottom step, he raised an arm weakly—as though to point. The arm fell. He gasped but could not speak. When we reached him an instant later he was dead. Afterward this coin was found tightly clasped in one hand."

"And then?" I asked, as M'sieu Antoine paused.

The farmer shrugged.

"And then we buried him," said he. "As for the coin, I formed the conclusions which you have probably formed yourself."

"Lafitte the pirate?" I ventured.

"Who else?" he returned. "He used this bayou. Also he is said to have buried treasure along it. If my father could only have lived to speak! But he gave the promise, and I gave the name."

"And you have searched, of course," said I.

"Searched?" cried M'sieu Antoine. "Look about you and you will see. First myself and then the neighbors. They dug away the bayou bank until my fields were well-nigh exchanged for a lake. They riddled the forest so that it looked like a honeycomb. As for the farm, I would not allow it to be touched, since it has come down from before the pirate's time. Surely even Lafitte would not plant his gold in the heart of another man's clearing."

"And yet, m'sieu, you must surely have enough without this phantom silver," said I.

"Enough and to spare, since there is only my daughter and myself," he agreed. "The trouble is that it is here, it is mine and I can not ha e it. It is like raising a tree, the fruit of which you are unable to pluck. It was my father's chief legacy, and it is my duty to see that its realization is passed on to my line. I can not die content until this is done. Now perhaps if I start all over again in a systematic manner——"

And thus he went on, advancing new theories, planning fresh searches, until the physician arrived.

With the physician's report I could not but be content. Thanks to my acting quickly, I had brought Renaud in time, said the doctor. The poison had gained but a slight hold so far, and would readily yield to treatment. A week, two weeks perhaps, and my partner would be well again. As for M'sieu Antoine, he seemed almost as pleased as myself at this news, assuring me that I might return to my work without fear as, until all was as it should be, Renaud must remain his guest.

Thus I went back to my camp with a light heart and, for a week or more, reaped the harvest of the traps alone. Often, when my work was done, I would paddle up the bayou in the quiet of the afternoon to see my partner and drink a glass with M'sieu Antoine. Then there came a day when Renaud, his trouble healed, gave many thanks to all, and departed with me for the marsh.

It had been but an incident, m'sieu, one of the many mishaps of our calling, yet its effect upon my partner was apparent from the first. Into his eyes had come a new light. His voice had taken on a strange softness. Often, as he went about his business, I would catch him gazing at the drift of smoke that rose above the forest. Often also he would paddle up-stream at sunset, to return with the reluctance of one who has spent an hour in Paradise. Thus his romance grew until he returned one day in a daze of joy.

"Bossu, Bossu!" he cried. "I have asked her and she has said yes. Think of it—Loisette! In my illness I would have been well content to die with her at my side. And now I am to have her through life. I can not believe that it is true!"

"And M'sieu Antoine?" I asked. "You have spoken to him?"

"Not yet," replied Renaud. "But he will be all right. You know his way."

"Yet he is a father," said I. "He must consider his daughter's welfare. He is rich, and you have nothing. At least do not speak until we have finished our season. Perhaps by then you will have earned a little for your share."

Renaud's face fell, but, if anything, he was sensible.

"You are right, Bossu," he agreed. "For the moment I forgot my pride. If, when

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we are through, our skins are not many, it will not be my fault."

After this he did the work of two men, scouring the marsh until our luck increased far beyond my greatest expectations. In the end we sold out to the buyers at Morgan City for an amount that is spoken of to this day.

OUR business done, and our money in our pockets, Renaud made a last request of me. I must return up the Bayou Vermillion with him, he said. Each moment now, he realized more the greatness of his request, and I must lend him my support. Through my visits from the marsh, M'sieu Antoine and myself had become fast friends. If there was any pleading to be done, it would best come from me.

It was a little thing and, having agreed to it, we found ourselves once more upon the gallery at Silver Promise, where M'sieu Antoine greeted us cordially, congratulating us upon our success. As for Loisette, she hovered in the background, alive with anxiety, her cheeks flushed, her soul in her eyes. Then, when the girl was gone and the glasses had been filled for the second time, Renaud spoke his desire.

When he was through, the farmer entered the house, returning with something which he held in one hand.

"*Bien*," said he, and his voice was not unkind. "I have been expecting this. It has come many times before, although, with the others, it was to myself and not to my daughter that they first referred. Now I like you, m'sieu. You have honesty, you have industry, you have contentment —which I prize above all. Yet my answer to you must be as it has always been."

He paused and, opening his hand, disclosed his silver coin.

"Bring from my land the mate to this, and Loisette is yours," he continued. "Otherwise you must ask in vain."

"The mate?" echoed Renaud. "What good is a single piece?"

"Where the mate is, there will the others be," replied M'sieu Antoine. "I shall be satisfied with the one!"

"But, m'sieu," cried Renaud, "you ask what is impossible!"

The farmer shook his head.

"I ask only my daughter's true dowry," he returned. "What are house and fields compared to the treasure of Lafitte? I have sought my father's gift, and I have failed. I do not intend that my daughter shall have the same misfortune. Either her husband shall bring her the treasure or its equivalent. Until my Loisette has reached the age of twenty, the field is open to any worthy man. After that, if she is not won, I shall marry her to M'sieu Laval, the planter. He is not young, perhaps, but he has a kind heart, and his fortune will more than balance the promise. This I have sworn."

"But, m'sieu," I began, when the farmer held up his hand.

"Enough," said he firmly. "You have heard, and I have sworn. Also my child has promised. Perhaps she did so without the knowledge of love, but she is a good daughter, and she will keep her word. It is not a matter of money with me. It is a question of justice, of what is due."

After this there was naught to do save to plan the details of our search. To argue, even had M'sieu Antoine allowed it, would have been of no avail. He was that kind —the huge, easy-going sort who, ever good-natured about most matters, are as iron in their chosen few. Also it was plainly apparent that the coin had become an obsession with him. The solitude of the forest had only served to increase the shock that his father's discovery and death had wrought upon his mind.

OF OUR search, which began the following morning, I need tell you little. M'sieu Antoine gave every assistance but, save for his coin and his story, there was naught to go upon. True, the treasure must lie close, or the father, with his weight, could not have reached it. But what was close in that wilderness?

Yet we sought and toiled, digging the riddled forest, paring the bayou-bank, searching beneath the very water itself, until even Renaud was forced to admit the hopelessness of our task. It was a hard trial for him, this performance of an impossible feat, and each day of disappointment but served to rust the brightness of his nature. Later when, having despaired, we returned to the bay, I sought to comfort him.

"Take heart," said I. "It is but a mad idea of the old man's, and he has said that he likes you. In addition you have the

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girl's love. Surely all will be well in time."

But Renaud was not to be encouraged.

"In time?" he cried. "Do you not know that Loisette has already passed her nineteenth birthday? In less than a year the arrangement will be made with M'sieu Laval. The father is mad, yes, but it is a lasting madness. As for the girl, despite her love she will keep her promise. She has said so, and she means it."

"Then what will you do?" I asked.

"Do?" he replied. "I will go back, of course. It is hopeless, but the thing will draw me. Perhaps, by the time of Loisette's marriage, I will have grubbed a thousand holes in which to bury myself."

It was sad, m'sieu, but what could I do? We parted and, through the fishing, I took careful heed of the reports of Renaud that came from the Bayou Portage. Now he was moping about the camp. Now, seized with some fresh hope, he was away up the Bayou Vermillion. Now he was back again, more downcast than before.

Thus it went on through Summer and Fall until the business of the approaching Winter called me away from news of him. I trapped that season upon the coast—since through our efforts the secret marsh was in need of a rest—and I had been installed a month or more when Renaud knocked one night upon the door of my hut. He was but a ghost of his former self, and his old contentment was gone for a look of settled despair.

"Bossu," said he, "I have come to see if there is anything that you can do. In less than a month the arrangement will be made with M'sieu Laval, and there is no more time. Think, Bossu, *think!* For the sake of our companionship. If any one can read the wild, it is yourself. Once you found a trail through the waters of a cypress-swamp. Can you not find the trail of this silver promise?"

"Renaud," said I, "I would give my life to serve you. I have thought of this as I have thought of no other thing before. Yet I can only repeat that it is hopeless."

Renaud sighed wearily.

"So," said he, "it is as I thought. This then is the end. I can go on no more. And all for an old man's madness! Loisette cares naught for the silver. She has more than enough for this life. She can not take it with her when she is dead."

He paused to bury his face in his hands while I, his words still ringing in my ears, was struck with a sudden memory.

"She can not take it with her when she dies," Renaud had said, and on the instant I saw the garden beside the church at Landry, and the old curé sitting out beneath his favorite fig-tree. His gaze was on the ancient graveyard and, as I lay in the grass beside him, he told of the long-forgotten customs of those who had gone before.

This much my memory brought back to me before Renaud, raising his head, uttered a startled cry.

"*Dieu*, Bossu!" he gasped. "You have an idea. I can see it in your face."

"I have a thought," said I. "It is only a vague one, but, if you are willing, we will follow it up."

And I told him of what was in my mind.

When I was through, Renaud was once more alive with hope, calling me his savior and declaring that this final chance could not fail. He walked the marsh all night in his impatience. He hurried me into his pirogue a good hour before dawn. He paddled to such good purpose that near sunset we had made the landing at Silver Promise.

M'SIEU ANTOINE greeted us with the news of his daughter's approaching betrothal, expressing a regret, however, that my companion was not the lucky man. And well he might, for there was no doubting the feelings of his child. Like Renaud, she was but a shadow of despair.

In explanation of our visit I told of a final search, although I gave no hint of how that search was to be made. Rather I went over the well-worn ground of forest and bayou-bank until, the subject exhausted, I led the talk to M'sieu Antoine's forefathers, and the real object of our journey.

"And these forefathers of yours?" I asked when the time was ripe. "They were buried here at Silver Promise?"

"They were," replied M'sieu Antoine. "They lay out there in the upper field, beneath that single live-oak. My grandfather, however, had them moved to the church in the prairie. It was a useless thing, since when they dug down they found nothing. As well take a spadeful from any other part of the field."

"So," said I, and changed the subject, having learned what I had come to hear.

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That night, when all had been long asleep, Renaud and I slipped from a window, and made our way toward the upper field. With us we carried spades and a lantern and, when we reached the oak that marked the ancient burial-ground, we set to work to dig in a circle about it. Also we toiled in a manner far different from our former efforts. Each clod was broken and examined. Each spadeful was carefully scattered. We winnowed the earth as a farmer sifts his grain.

It was no cheerful task, that harrying of the rifled graves. Strange shadows flitted past in the cold white moonbeams. The bayou breeze whined mournfully, like a protest from the dead. Yet we kept on, ever widening our circle—Renaud working in a frenzy, myself growing ever less confident as the unsuccessful hours dragged past. Once, as we beat out a clod, there came a clink of metal which caused us to glow with hope, until we found our prize to be but the rusted tag of a saddle. Once also we came upon a slender, earth-encrusted thing which might have been a bone, at which we uncovered, making the sign of the Cross.

The moonlight faded, the stars twinkled out, the breeze came cool and fresh from the bayou, sounding the note of the coming day. From the oak there came a sleepy piping of birds, and little bars of pink began to stain the grayness of the sky. It was then that, weary and blistered, I threw down my spade.

"I can do no more," I declared. "We must explain to M'sieu Antoine, and trust to his belief. Surely, when he has heard, he will be only too eager to help us."

But Renaud stubbornly refused.

"He will never do so," said he. "He is treasure-mad, I tell you. Naught will serve him save Lafitte. I will work until I am discovered. After that I am done for good."

He thrust in his spade as he finished speaking, and then, in the first flush of the coming dawn, we found it. It was only a small, solid cake of earth that rolled from a broken clod, and Renaud, in his despair, would have swept it aside. But I caught the line of a rounded rim thrust out from the soil—and in an instant more we had won.

Ah, the triumph of that moment, m'sieu! How we rejoiced! How we washed the coin with dew-soaked grass! How we rubbed it upon our blouses until each line of the ancient stamping stood out in plain relief!

Then came the hurried journey to the house where M'sieu Antoine, his daughter behind him, greeted us at the door.

HAGGARD, earth-stained, weary and unstrung from many sleepless nights, Renaud yet played his part with a dignity worthy of the occasion.

"Did you not say, m'sieu, that if from your land I brought the mate to your coin, I should have Loisette?" he asked in a quiet voice.

"I did," replied the farmer.

"Then here it is!" said Renaud, and in an instant the girl was in his arms.

His face aflame, his eyes like moons, M'sieu Antoine stared at the coin that Renaud had handed him.

"The silver promise!" he gasped finally. "Let us go to the treasure this instant! Too long have I——"

But I caught his arm.

"There is no treasure, m'sieu," said I. "Your father thought that he had found one, and in his excitement he forgot what he would have remembered had he lived. Look back, m'sieu, and perhaps you will recall the custom yourself—those coins that were buried with the ancient dead that they might pay their way across that dark river which separates the spirit from its final home. We made our find at the spot that was your old burial-ground. Your father did the same. A passing plow and a rifled grave are responsible for his death, and your dream of treasure."

There was a space of silence while M'sieu Antoine considered what I had said. Slowly the excitement, the desire, faded from his face, and in their stead came a look of peace. That he was not disappointed I can swear. Rather was he like one who has been relieved of some heavy burden.

"*Bien*," said he at last. "I see it all now. I should have known. And as for this——"

Raising the coin, he held it for a moment in the morning light. Then he cast it from him and turned toward the lovers, his arms outstretched.

"Come," he cried. "You will make a son after my own heart, Renaud. Believe me, you are very welcome at Antoine's Farm!"

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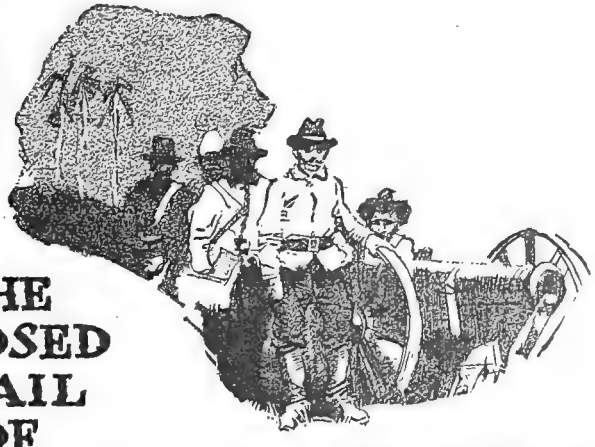
LE BOSSU paused to signal a fisherman who was hurrying along the bayou-bank.

"So that is all, m'sieu," he concluded his tale. "And there is Valsan, coming as usual with the tide."

"And the gift?" I asked.

The little man pulled out his package and shook it until it gave forth the unmistakable sounds of an infant's rattle.

"For the little Loisette—the real treasure that M'sieu Antoine has found at Antoine's Farm!" he explained. "She has a birthday this week, and I must pay the event its due. Otherwise I would be no proper godfather to Antoine's treasure."



THE CLOSED TRAIL OF WILLIAM WALKER

The American who Turned Central America Topsyturvy

By Talbot Mundy

I simply say he was my friend
When strong of hand and fair of fame;
Dead and disgraced, I stand the same
To him, and so shall to the end!

A MAN may fail, and the world at large may brand his memory with taunts and infamy; but when the friends who failed with him, under his command, write lines like the above about him, he can not be said to have lived and labored utterly in vain. He could at least choose real friends, and make them love him—two qualities that will help any man to stand out head and shoulders above the rank and file. And William Walker did more than merely choose friends and make them love him; he led them on a wild campaign against a continent, and made a handful of them guard his back while he dared three nations. He was a man, was Walker!

There were five feet four inches of him, with his shoes on, straight, ramrod inches. He had the big blue-gray eyes of a dreamer, the nose of an Arthur Wellesley, and the jaw-bone of a Nelson of the Nile.

He succeeded at many other things before he fought his way to the presidency of a republic. He was a banker's son, but banking had no charm for him, being too peaceful and humdrum a vocation. He became a law-student, with a particular and discriminating eye on international law, and when he had sucked all the available sources of information dry, he studied medicine for a while in Germany. But medicine proved much too peaceful for his taste, so

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he returned to the United States, and began his real career.

From that day until his death he was by turns lawyer, newspaper-reporter, editor, lawyer again; filibuster for a while, and then once more an editor; again a filibuster, Commander-in-chief of the army of a republic, President of that same republic, with a properly accredited and accepted minister at Washington, a fugitive from justice, a prisoner of war; and from that he went by short, quick, grimly contested stages to his death.

He died backed up against a stone wall, in a four-square courtyard in the early morning—blindfolded and with his hands made fast behind him. Eight riflemen, who trembled at something other than the morning cool, stood still and faced him. There was a sharp command in Spanish, the "present" at twenty measured paces, one more command, followed by a ragged volley that echoed and reëchoed through the narrow streets of Trujillo, and the man who had led one hundred and fifty men against a nation, and had made them win, fell forward in a shapeless heap—a good man wasted!

THE AMERICAN MAN OF DESTINY

THE chief trouble with him seems to have been that he thought himself a man of destiny. Like Napoleon the First, he believed that he had a mission to reshape a continent, if not the world, and he tried to use much the same methods as Napoleon. If he arrived at a somewhat similar result, it was because his faults were much the same; and he arrived at it sooner, because in him the weaknesses of the great Napoleon were exaggerated without the compensating breadth of view.

It was reading of the great Napoleon that fired him first with the idea of making himself an Emperor; and it was his practise at the bar that showed him what a power he had to sway men.

He had given up the law for a while, and was holding a leading editorial position on the *Crescent* of New Orleans when the California gold-rush of '49 commenced, and he seized that opportunity to cut adrift from the tameness and day-in-day-out sameness that he hated. It was not the lure of gold that drew him across the continent, for throughout his whole career he displayed an almost amusing contempt for money, except as a sometimes necessary means to an end, and a very ready weapon with which to work the punishment of his enemies. He had none of the meaner, sordid vices, and no ambition for personal wealth.

He stuck to journalism, and very shortly after his arrival in California he became attached to the San Francisco *Herald*—once more in an editorial position, and his real fighting-qualities showed themselves at the very outset. Scathing articles from his pen began to appear on almost every conceivable subject of local interest, and his intolerance for any one's opinion but his own soon got him into serious trouble.

He was imprisoned, and fined five hundred dollars, two facts which are in themselves proof of his vitriolic temper; for in those days a man had to be singularly libelous before the law took any notice of him. But he himself added further proof, the moment that he was released from jail, by bringing suit against the judge who had sentenced him. He appeared in person before the legislature and conducted his own case and, although he failed to gain his purpose, he won such universal praise for his ability that from that day forward he was a marked man from end to end of California.

He gave up newspaper-work for good after that, and went to Marysville, where he very soon became the most prominent lawyer in the place, establishing a record by winning every case that he conducted, and feeding the fire of his ambition steadily as success after success came to him. Marysville was presently too small to hold him.

The world-old "go-fever" that gets into the veins of "men of destiny" began to make him restless. A new state in the making was not scene enough for his activity. The sea called him, and whatever lay beyond the sea.

AN ADVENTURER FOR PARTS UNKNOWN

SO HE threw up his flourishing practise, with a disregard for mere material prosperity that was characteristic of him, and took the first ship that was sailing in any direction the moment that he reached San Francisco again.

The ship happened to be bound for Mexico, and so it happened that Walker visited Guaymas in 1852.

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But for the incident of that ship's destination he might have won a greater presidency than the insecure, contested one that he gave his life for, since there is no limit to the prospects of an American citizen who can command the respect and obedience of others. But that short trip proved the undoing of him. It fired him with a false ambition, and started him like a brilliant meteoric spark, to glow for a little while with a white heat and then swiftly fade.

He landed in Guaymas when Count Raousset de Boulbon was making his ill-fated attempt to recreate a French Empire in Mexico. Though Raousset's efforts failed completely, Walker saw what a man of spirit and energy could do, if well backed-up. It dawned on him—slowly at first, then with the full force of absolute conviction—that here was his mission in life. Here lay his destiny. To quote his own words on his return to California, "the effete and decadent descendants of the early Spanish colonists must eventually succumb, and give place to the superior activity and intelligence of the Anglo-Saxon." And he, William Walker, was the man—the superman—appointed by destiny to lead the vanguard of the superrace.

No sooner thought of than attempted. For that was William Walker's way. Throughout his whole career prompt action went charging after his decisions. He had saved some money while at Marysville, and he now showed his contempt for it by spending every cent of it on the purchase of a small brig named the *Arrow*, which he stocked with all the warlike provisions and material he could get together. Then he began to cast about for men, and the authorities, who already knew him for a firebrand, began to grow suspicious. They watched the *Arrow* closely, and before long seized it, and held it pending explanations.

But Walker was not overprone to explanations at any time; and he was an expert at turning temporary defeats to his own advantage. The Government's opposition only served to give him a much-needed advertisement, and the impounded *Arrow* served as a stalking-horse. He let the Government watch the brig, and draw its own conclusions, while he bent his energies in another direction.

There were plenty of men in California whose sporting-instincts urged them to back a man like Walker with money, whether they believed him right or wrong. They wanted to see sport, and they were certain that Walker was the man to show it to them. So funds soon became available. And with the funds came men.

The spirit that had drawn hordes across a continent in search of gold could send at least a handful off with Walker in search of fresh adventures. The money that could buy him a new bark in place of the brig the authorities had held, could buy, if not protection, at least relaxation of vigilance.

So, on the *Caroline*, with forty-five good men on board all told, William Walker slipped his moorings one night in San Francisco harbor, and was well out to sea before the gunboats could start after him. And after an absolutely uneventful voyage all of the forty-five succeeded in landing at La Paz.

Promptly—with only forty-four men at his back, remember!—Walker issued the following amazing proclamation. He posted it on the quay at La Paz, and on the court-house, and set sentries to guard the notices.

Sonora Expedition
LOWER CALIFORNIA DECREED A REPUBLIC
Colonel William Walker Declared President
Proclamation Issued on the
Third Day of November, 1853
The Republic of Lower California is Hereby
Declared Free, Sovereign, and Independent,
And all Allegiance to the Republic of Mexico
Is Forever
RENOUNCED

He had sent Lower California no notice of his coming. He had had no invitation, and there was no known list of grievances under which the people suffered. He was a bolt from the blue, an unknown quantity, the advance-guard of nobody in Lower California knew what; and La Paz, La Grulla, and St. Thomas were his without a shot fired or a man lost!

Then Walker's real plans unfolded; his volcanic brain and quick imagination answering as readily to the promptings of success as his fighting-instincts had rallied to his assistance in a crisis. He issued a second proclamation, changing the name of the new Republic to Sonora, and claiming about a third of Mexico as his already. If one bite at a time was a rule of his, he certainly believed in big bites.

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He made no secret to his little force of his intention to conquer the whole of Mexico eventually, and he so instilled the fire of his own ambition into them that four of them—as ambitious as himself, if from rather different motives—conceived the idea of separating from the force and forming a private company for the purpose of looting the continent in Walker's wake. They talked a little too loudly, though, and were rather too openly ambitious. Walker got wind of their intentions, and summoned a drumhead court martial at once.

Within an hour, he had sentenced two of the four men to be shot, and had seen the sentence carried out. In less than another hour he had had the other two men flogged and drummed out of the camp, thus establishing once and for all the fact that he who followed William Walker must obey him. He was not content, even, with mere obedience. His men, and even the officers whom he appointed, were obliged to subordinate body and mind and soul to him. He would brook no opinion, and no ambition but his own—a quality that made him president of a republic later on, but just as surely worked his undoing in the end.

While Walker was temporarily succeeding beyond his wildest dreams in Mexico, other things were happening. He was not destined to attempt the subjugation of Sonora with the tiny handful he had with him. News of his preliminary success had reached home, and in San Francisco there were one hundred and fifty more men ready to come to his assistance, under the command of a certain Colonel Watkins.

They had clubbed together and had bought the *Amita*, a little coasting-brig. They had hired a warehouse near the dock, and had stocked it full of arms and ammunition and provisions. They were all men of the right type—anxious for adventure, and regardless of the cost of it—and they were not in the least deterred from their object by the obvious fact that the authorities were watching them.

At a preconcerted signal late one afternoon, they made a sudden rush for their little ship; and such was their skill and speed, so perfectly were all the details arranged beforehand, that they had the *Amita* manned and loaded, and even their six rifled cannon on board with them, before the authorities had time to interfere. Once out at sea beyond the limit, no gunboats had a right to interfere with them. So another uneventful voyage took place, and William Walker received reinforcements before he expected them.

TO CONQUER A NATION

WALKER wasted not a minute after the arrival of Colonel Watkins and the guns. Dragging the guns by hand, driving more than a hundred head of cattle along in front of them for food, and with the spare ammunition packed on mules, the little force advanced in close formation, headed for the heart of Sonora, which should kneel to them, or swallow them, or spew them out again, as the Fates who guard the brave might direct.

It was rank, blank madness! Behind them were three surrendered cities, which had barely felt their heel, and a population that cared nothing for them. In front lay the whole of Mexico, defended by the climate of the damned, and by Indians who would fight or loot whichever side proved easiest. But the men believed in Walker, and Walker believed in himself and his own destiny; so the word was "Forward!"

The climate was the first enemy to take its toll of them. Up in the mountains that piled up between them and the Colorado River, the wind blew fierce and cold, and sapped at the hearts of all but the bravest of the party. Twenty of the cattle got away one night, and of the men whom Walker sent to find them and drive them back two deserted and sneaked back to the coast and warmth again. Nothing rots away the core of an army like desertion; it makes the other men disheartened.

Soon thirty Indians joined them, and agreed to herd the cattle; but the very first night after they had joined, the Indians cleared out, and took thirty of the cattle with them. Walker took no more chances on native assistance after that. He set a strong guard round the camp each night, and made his own men herd the cattle that remained. But the cattle were half wild, and his men were by no means cowboys. The storms drenched and chilled them and made them sick. The cattle stampeded at every opportunity. The thorns pierced them and tore their clothes to rags, and they were all reduced to rations of uncommonly poor beef, without so much as salt to flavor it. Walker made the mistake of

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wasting valuable time and energy in hunting for the cattle that had got away and, although he set a splendid example of courage and endurance, man after man deserted. Less than three weeks after the start, every man who was with him had had enough of it. But Walker insisted on pressing on.

What was left of the force crossed the Colorado River, five miles above its mouth, worn out, disheartened and in rags. Walker himself scarcely had a rag to his back by this time, and was wearing only one shoe. But, unlike the others, he was still as game as when he started. The Indian cattlemen who had left them in the mountains had carried word ahead of their coming, and the little force had no sooner crossed the river than a large force of Mexican Regulars hove into view on the sky-line, and stayed there, declining to comè closer.

Urged by his men, Walker ordered a retreat, and the Mexicans followed on either flank, keeping at a safe distance and contenting themselves by cutting off all stragglers. When the force halted for a rest the Mexican Commander kept sending messengers to offer indemnity to any of Walker's men who would come over to him, and the messengers spoke too of clothing and warm food and liquor. Man after man took advantage of the offer, falling behind and allowing himself to be overtaken by the following enemy. Three days after meeting with the Mexicans Walker had only five-and-twenty bitterenders left.

"COME AND FIGHT FOR THEM!"

EVEN Walker had to admit by that time that further advance was useless; but not even those dire straits could take the fight out of him. He recrossed the Colorado River, and camped, if a force that has neither tents nor clothes nor boots may be said to camp. And the Mexican Commander had formed such an opinion of him, and had heard such accounts of him from the deserters, that he still declined to tackle him at close quarters.

He sent a messenger, and called on Walker to lay down his arms and surrender, offering him indemnity and a safe passage to the United States border if he would comply. And without a rag to his back, with hunger gnawing at him, and his thorn-wounds festering, Walker flung back his answer to the messenger:

"Go tell your General that if he wants my arms he may come and fight for them!"

Then he turned his attention to his twenty-five again, and started to fire them once more with some of his own indomitable courage. He stung them with taunts, and stirred them with example, and made them —made them—march with him until they reached the United States border. And there, defeated but not by any means dishonored, he surrendered to Captain Burton, the officer commanding the United States garrison at San Diego.

Burton accepted his parole, but made him promise he would go direct to San Francisco and stand his trial. Walker kept his word, surrendering to the authorities there at the earliest moment possible. He was charged at once with filibustering and, since he had no money of his own, he was offered the services of counsel by the State. But Walker declined the offer, and preferred to have the conduct of his own case. They remonstrated with him, and pointed out to him the seriousness of the charge, but he insisted on his way. He put up the most brilliant defense in the annals of the San Francisco courts, and was acquitted!

He claimed that he was not a filibuster; he was a president. He cited international law to prove than an invading force that has made good its hold on a foreign country, and has proclaimed the independence of that country with due formality, is entitled to the rights of a belligerent. He was neither a rebel nor a pirate, but a duly proclaimed president, suffering from temporary defeat, and claiming the protection and hospitality of the United States!

He claimed, too, that there was no evidence against him that could hold in any court of law, for there was not a single Mexican witness there to prove that he had even done any fighting. He said that he had infringed no neutrality laws, since he had done nothing but defend himself against a force which had tried to dispossess him from an already established and proclaimed presidency of a sovereign and independent state. He so tied up the judge and jury with his eloquence and knowledge of international legal technicalities that they acquitted him on all the grounds of the indictment.

From that minute he was a popular hero, with all California at his feet. Crowds gathered to see him, and even senators and

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high court judges flocked to his rooms to have a word with him. There were rumors that he would be asked to stand for Congress, and other rumors to the effect that he was getting ready for another expedition.

But throughout it all he maintained an air of quiet dignity and complete silence as to his plans for the future which served to enhance his reputation without committing him in any way at all.

WITHOUT A CENT

HE WAS penniless now, but that did not disturb him in the least. At once he set about to repair his fortunes in the first way that came handy. Without the slightest intention of resuming journalism for good, he accepted a temporary position on the editorial staff of the San Francisco *Commercial Advertiser*, and three months later he became editor of the *State Journal*. In both capacities he found himself in a position to watch what was happening in Central America, and to keep himself at the same time in the public eye.

He seems to have realized by this time that the conquest of Mexico was more than he would ever be able to accomplish, but he knew perfectly well that his reputation as a fighting-man of skill and determination had spread far and wide, and he was not at all surprised when emissaries approached him from Nicaragua.

Then, as now, Nicaragua was torn in pieces by a dozen rival factions clustered into two main parties. In Walker's time the rival camps were known as "Clericals" and "Democrats." The "Clericals" were the upper-dog—the party in power, which held all the enviable positions, and nearly all the wealth, and had the courts under their absolute control. And the "Democrats" were extremely wishful to displace them. The Democrats were made up of at least six smaller parties, who had joined together for the purpose of a revolution. One of these parties consisted mainly of export-merchants, and that particular party was held in deep distrust by all the others. It was this small party-within-a-party that wrote to Walker, sent an envoy to him and began to dicker about terms.

The Democrats were up in arms already, and had the Clerical party on the run. General Castellon, of the Democrats, had been besieging President Chamorro—who was, of course, a Clerical—for the past nine months in Grenada; but the strength of the besieging force had waned a little, and the Clerical party was beginning to gain throughout the country.

There was need for haste, for prompt, decisive action, if the Democrats were to win the day and get their turn at plundering the unhappy country, and it seemed to that party of important merchants that Walker was just the brand of fearless filibuster whom they were seeking to help them in their hour of need.

Walker began to get ready for action the moment that the first tentative advances were made to him; but he was far too much a lawyer and diplomatist to fall in with their schemes at once. On the one hand he set about interviewing tirelessly various men of means in San Francisco, arguing with them, persuading them and getting sums of money from them in return for promises. Also he began recruiting men—not dock-rats, such as make up the rank and file of so many filibustering-expeditions, but real, strong, stout-hearted men, of the kind he cared to lead.

And on the other hand he bargained with the Nicaraguan envoys. He demanded bigger grants of land, and better Government positions for his men when the fighting was all over and the Democratic party should be in power. He seems to have held out for nothing for himself, but to have insisted on adequate rewards for the men who went with him, and for the men in San Francisco who stood ready to finance him, or who had done so already. And while he bargained, General Castellon died.

The siege of Grenada was raised, and the Democratic party was left without a leader that it trusted.

The General's death was Walker's opportunity. The envoys from Nicaragua agreed to everything he bargained for, and insisted only on immediate action. They promised him everything they had to offer, or would have to offer, in the event of victory, except the very necessary money. But money Walker contrived to raise in San Francisco. He raised enough to buy a ship, the *Vesta*, and he mortgaged the *Vesta* for sufficient money with which to purchase arms and ammunition. Then the first setback happened.

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A COUNTY SEAL *VS.* A GENERALSHIP

THE *Vesta's* mortgagees got wind of his intention to depart on a filibustering-expedition, and foreclosed promptly. By dint of tremendous effort, Walker raised enough money to pay off their lien, only to find that the ship was still held for county fees, amounting to three hundred and fifty dollars. And three hundred and fifty dollars proved beyond his power to raise at the last minute. He had a ship ready, and sixty-one men, and arms and ammunition, and provisions; but the deputy sheriff was on board the ship, with papers that bore the county seal.

The situation would have sent almost any other man than Walker crazy. But Walker, remembering his destiny, and summoning the grim determination that made up nine-tenths of him, to his assistance, acted instead of wasting further time. The deputy sheriff was taking things easy, and watching the business of preparation with mild interest. He had a little body of assistants within call, but he was so confident in his own power and dignity and authority that he let them play poker ashore behind shut doors, and gave no thought whatever to the possibility of being taken by surprise.

A sudden rush was made at him one afternoon, and before he could shout for help he was gagged, and hustled down below into a cabin, where a box of cigars and a case of cheap champagne had been opened in preparation for him. There he was left, to smoke and drink to his heart's content, until an opportunity should arise for getting rid of him! When night fell, the *Vesta* slipped her cables, and a waiting tug, whose owner had received his payment in advance, took hold of her and towed her out well beyond the harbor-mouth. There, beyond the three-mile limit, the deputy sheriff was carried up, drunk and incapable, on deck, and lowered overside into the tug's rowboat, to go back to San Francisco and explain matters as best he might. Once more William Walker was on the high seas in command of an expedition; and this time he seemed not to have misjudged his destiny.

But any other man than Walker would have ceased to hope a day after he had landed. It turned out that the merchants who had sent him such a pressing invitation had been scheming in their own interests, and that they represented a quite insignificant portion of Nicaraguan opinion. The revolutionists, taken as a body, resented deeply what they considered foreign intervention. It seemed to them that Walker might be a vanguard of projected American occupation, and even Chamorro, whom they knew, seemed to them better than a Government whose methods they could only guess at. They were disposed to get along without any assistance from William Walker and his men, and they gave him an uncommonly cool reception.

But that did not trouble Walker. He had come to help somebody, and he meant to do it. He was not the man to slip out of San Francisco harbor right under the eyes of the authorities, lead an expedition all that distance and then go home again with his chin down. Honduras, he heard, was beginning to make war on Guatemala; so he decided on the instant to "help" Honduras. If the "decadent descendants of the Spanish conquerors" were to succumb to the Anglo-Saxon, as he steadfastly believed, they might as well start succumbing in Guatemala as elsewhere!

He had actually started for Honduras. He had addressed his men, had told them of his intentions, had received an enthusiastic ovation from them. He had marched nearly a hundred miles on his new quest, when other counsels prevailed among the Nicaraguan revolutionists. A man such as this, who made up his mind and acted on the instant, was something different from what they had expected, and something, too, that was too good to be missed. They called him back again, and asked him to go and capture Rivas for them.

THE PHALANX OF THE SWAMPS

WALKER wasted no time in argument or bargaining, but started off at once. He marched with fifty-eight of his own men, and one hundred native troops under the command of a Nicaraguan Colonel. After a long and terribly trying struggle through dense forest and pestilential swamp, he reached Rivas, and found it held by more than a thousand of the enemy. It was a strongly defended place, situated on a plain that had been cleared from the middle of a dense forest. There was no cover near it, or very little, to protect an attack-

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ing-force, and the wall that surrounded it was nothing less than a battlement. Eight hundred to a thousand men might have had a fair chance against the defenders; but Walker, with one hundred and fifty-eight, attacked at once!

It was his first real battle—his first real opportunity to show the stuff that he was made of, and to justify his claim to be a leader of men. He made the most of it. The forest that surrounded Rivas was out of rifle-range, but his Nicaraguans displayed little of his own enthusiasm, so he placed them on three sides of the town, round the edge of the forest, with instructions to pepper away at the defenders and at least keep them occupied.

Then, on the fourth side, he led half of his own men as close to the ramparts as he could, and placed them under whatever cover he could find, so that they could keep up a hot fire on the defenders while he led the remaining twenty-five or so to the attack. And the volcanic, unconquerable hothead succeeded, where a wiser and more cautious leader would have failed.

The volleys started, regularly timed and straight-aimed, hard-bitten Forty-niners; and they were answered by howls and ragged, intermittent firing from the wall. Then, while the close-range bullet-duel shrieked and barked backward and forward, and the defenders were bending all their attention and energy on dislodging the firing-party from their cover, Walker placed himself at the head of his little storming-party and led them on to an attack which should rank as one of the most daring in all history.

It was a sudden, swift, unexpected shock; a wedge, driven in by unconquerable courage, before the defenders could have time to realize that it was coming. And the point of the wedge was Walker, the five-feet-four-inch firebrand! He was up and over the wall at such a pace that his men were hard put to it to follow him. He held the top of the wall at the sword-point until his twenty-five could swarm it after him. And there the whole twenty-five fought until the rest could leave their cover and come to their assistance. Then, with a rush and a roar and the flash of bayonets at the charge, the eight and fifty leapt into the crowd and followed Walker into the town—straight for the heart of things.

HOUSE-TO-HOUSE CARNAGE

BUT Rivas was not captured yet by any means. There was house-to-house fighting ahead, and no kind of fighting calls for greater generalship or greater individual courage. Walker displayed the coolness and courage of a tried commander, and his men had the utmost confidence in him before the fighting had lasted half an hour. But the shock of the attack was over now, and they had to depend on other tactics, less calculated to serve a small force against a bigger one.

He placed his men one by one on the house-tops, whence they could direct a withering fire upon the enemy, and he moved about among them directing their aim and encouraging them, and waiting for the Nicaraguans to come to his assistance. But the gallant Nicaraguans had decided to let the gringos do their fighting for them on this occasion, and retired into the forest to cook and eat their supper. As the afternoon wore on the defenders of Rivas found that they could devote the whole of their superior numbers to the task of ousting Walker.

Then Walker and his men became besieged instead of besiegers. Several of them were wounded. Walker himself had been hit in the throat by a spent bullet. The enemy surrounded them, and began to burn the houses underneath them. The Rivas forces raised a shout of victory, and, little knowing Walker, called on him to surrender.

He laughed at them, and rallied his men round him, and led them in another sudden, swift rush for a large wooden house that stood in the very middle of the town. There the little force barricaded itself, and proceeded to put up a fight such as Nicaraguans had never seen.

Nicaraguans, as a nation, are not cowards by any means. They are the victims of necessity and custom and ill leading. They can fight when an example is set them, and when the enemy has no relatives of theirs among his ranks. Walker set them the example. Eight and fifty gringos, with their backs against a wall, well-armed and led by a man like Walker would be example enough for any one. And Walker and his men were foreigners, whose wives and families were nothing to the men of Rivas, whose rifles were each worth a

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Nicaraguan ransom, and whose deaths therefore were things to be desired. The fight that followed was no pop-and-run revolutionary skirmish.

Time and again the Nicaraguans got up within ten yards of the house, and poured in a hail of bullets through the windows. Man after man of Walker's men was hit. Though the square was strewn with the bodies of the Nicaraguans and each attack was sent howling back again to shelter, Walker's situation grew more desperate, and the Nicaraguans plucked up greater courage every minute. The charges grew ever more savage.

At last, two hours after sunset, a rush succeeded. Torches were carried to the wooden building, and the dry planks blazed up into a holocaust. The flames showed piled-up bodies of the enemy on every hand, but they proved too that Walker's gallant attempt had failed, for all his swift, hot bravery.

The Nicaraguans withdrew, to watch the spectacle and glory in the death-screams of the roasting Yankees. But the flames that danced and roared showed them something unexpected. Long before the roof crashed in in a shower of sparks, almost before the last Nicaraguan had withdrawn himself to a safe distance, something was seen to move amid the shadows cast by the firelight. A swift-moving procession, headed by a little man whose throat was bandaged, a silent man who saw at least three ways at once, a man whose least motion was obeyed on the instant by the men who followed him, started from the burning building in the direction of the ramparts.

The procession started slowly, hampered by its wounded, and then laid its wounded down with a ten-man guard over them, and rushed—like a mad-angry swarm of hornets burned out of its nest—straight for the Nicaraguans.

That part of the battle lasted half the night, and Walker lost ten men killed in the course of it. The marvel is, though, that he only lost ten men. The Nicaraguans were secure under cover of the darkness, and half crazy to possess the rifles and ammunition that the Americans were using, and they knew the town and all its intricacies.

They hedged Walker and his men round on every side, and disputed every inch of their egress from the town.

THE MAN OF DESTINY CLEARS THE ROAD

WALKER, on the other hand, had first to clear a road by dint of terrific fighting, and then return along it to bring on his wounded. Then he would halt and repeat the process. The Nicaraguans barricaded themselves in houses that blocked the road, and Walker and his men made torches and burned them out again. Before the night was half over, the town of Rivas was in flames, and half the defending force was busily engaged in quenching them, leaving fewer, fortunately, to deal with Walker. It was midnight by the time that he had extracted his command from Rivas, hacked and volleyed and burned his way out and had withdrawn into the forest. Walker had failed again. But behind him, piled up or scattered in the streets of Rivas, lay more than five hundred of the defenders' dead, as a souvenir of Walker's visit!

He had failed; but his failure had made him famous. He had taught the Nicaraguans of how much he was capable with eight and fifty men, and he had become a power in the country in one night. He did not realize it yet, though, for he collected the Nicaraguan Colonel and the hundred men who had left him in the lurch, and fell back on Virgin Bay, where he entrenched himself, expecting hourly to be attacked. He did not know yet that the Nicaraguans had dubbed his small command the "Phalanx," and that they would rather have run across the continent than meet it.

He felt disheartened at his failure, and very nearly gave up the cause for lost. He actually started to march in the direction of Costa Rica, for even Walker doubted his ability to conquer Nicaragua with what were left of eight and fifty men, and he dared not trust the native troops after their behavior in front of Rivas. He decided to seek fresh fighting-grounds, where the natives might possibly have more enthusiasm for their own cause or his. But he changed his mind before he had gone many miles. His periods of doubt and despondency were very few and very short. He heard that there were comfortable barracks at San Juan del Sur, so he changed his course, marched on them and occupied them, to rest his men and give the wounded a fair chance to recover. He was still a lone man tackling a continent—for by this time his ideas had taken definite shape—but he was

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William Walker, and himself again, ready for what might happen.

A point to be remembered at this stage is that this little amazing man crammed all of his real adventures into so few years that he must have passed through mental phases and have changed his point of view at least twice as rapidly as even Napoleon himself. There is no knowing just at what stage in his career Napoleon conceived the notion of making himself world-emperor. And it is hard to say when Walker began to entertain the conviction that all Central America was his oyster.

But at about the time when he reached the barracks at San Juan del Sur, Colonel Doubleday—an Englishman who had cast in his lot with Walker, and was one of his stoutest and bravest adherents—began to be suspicious of his ultimate intentions. Doubleday did not actually charge Walker with overweening ambition yet. He still accepted as a fact Walker's contention that he was there to help the long-suffering Democratic party of Nicaragua. But he began to watch points very closely.

Walker had barely been long enough at San Juan del Sur for his wounded to get on their feet again when the little *Vesta* hove into view, and he decided on the instant to embark on her and return to Leon, where he would be better able to feel the pulse of things. He could never bear to be out of touch of the control of movements for more than a short period. He gave orders for immediate embarkation. Either from joy at the prospect of returning to more-or-less civilization, or else from sheer wanton delight in destruction, two of his men set fire to the barracks they had occupied, and the whole building went up in a blaze of fire that could not be extinguished. The men realized too late that destruction of that sort—at least when not ordered by himself—was not included in Walker's propaganda; and they had had sufficient experience of him already to know that he would not brook the slightest breach of subordination to himself. They tried to escape, but he caught them, and shot them himself, without even the formality of a trial.

HE THRUST ASIDE A CROWN

HIS return to Leon proved opportune. News of all that he had done at Rivas had, of course, preceded him, and he found himself already a national hero. Colonel Chillon, now leader of the Democratic party, had already started a movement to make Walker president of the republic, and greeted him when he landed with presidential honors. He had the plan all ready, and explained it to Walker in detail, and did his utmost to persuade him to fall in with it.

But Walker remembered Cæsar and Napoleon, and refused the high office at first. Like those two emperors, he distrusted the men who offered him the crown, and much preferred to take what he wanted in his own good time by means of force, instead of placing himself under obligations to men who would surely demand their price to the uttermost cent. Believing in his destiny, he believed that the opportunity he sought would not be long in coming, and he sat down in Leon and waited for it.

Then, for the second time, he was invited to attack Rivas. The growing strength of the Democratic party had done not a little to alarm the Clericals, and General Guardiola had been sent with heavy reinforcements to Rivas, to hold down that section of the country. Walker was requested to set sail at once and smash him, and Walker went, without a moment's hesitation.

He set sail again for San Juan del Sur with his own men and one hundred and thirty-six native soldiers, and on reaching his destination was delighted to learn that General Guardiola was coming out of Rivas to meet him, with an overwhelming force and the avowed intention of driving every gringo—Phalanx or no Phalanx—out of Nicaragua. He was told that Guardiola's men outnumbered his by at the very least five or six to one, and that they were so confident of victory that they had actually greased their bayonets in preparation for the slaughter that would follow.

"We'll show that gentleman!" said Walker; and without a day's delay he started out to meet him.

He met Guardiola just half-way between San Juan del Sur and Rivas. He stationed his Phalanx in the middle of his line, with the native auxiliaries on either wing. He did not wait then for Guardiola to develop his attack, or for his own men to eat their dinner. He placed himself at the head of the Phalanx, and led it straight for the center of Guardiola's line. The fight that followed lasted two short hours, and was a

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succession of attempted rallies by Guardiola.

At the first shock the Government men wilted, and retired. In fifteen minutes Walker had them on the run, and after that he kept them on the run and scattered them. The only thing that prevented him from slaughtering or capturing all of them was the smallness of his own force, although he would have been able to do much more if his Nicaraguan allies had fought instead of looting in his wake. But as it was he captured more than a hundred muskets, and all of Guardiola's official papers, and put the first clean, clear, unquestionable victory to his credit. The enemy scattered and retreated into hiding in the mountains, and left him in undisputed possession of the countryside.

There followed, then, the biggest thing that Walker ever did, although it was by a long way the least spectacular. He distrusted for the present the good faith of his nominal commander, and he could not believe the extent of his success. He believed that the Clerical party would set about prompt reprisals, and that he would be attacked as soon as a force could be sent from Grenada to deal with him. So he fell back on San Juan del Sur again, and put the place in a state of defense.

He had been there about a week when cholera broke out, and he was faced with the task of enforcing a proper quarantine and rigid sanitation among a people who regarded such measures in the light of heresy. He began with his own men, and enforced among them a state of discipline that would have been worthy of Napoleon or Wellington, and then he extended it to the native troops in his command. The native officers were jealous of him and of one another, and disputed his authority over their men. They declined flatly at first to obey any of his sanitary regulations, until he had made them so afraid of him that they barely dared think without his written permit. It took him a week to get them down to that point.

When they quarreled among themselves, he made them fight duels, and insisted that the duels should have a fatal termination—acting as referee himself, and making them shoot or slash at one another until one combatant was dead. They were all like brothers within a day or two, for a Nicaraguan lieutenant-colonel can realize as well as any man that death is a somewhat permanent condition that needs no urgent hastening. They found that quarreling was not worth while.

And when they disobeyed him, as they were disposed to do at first, he had his own unbeatable and splendidly disciplined Phalanx at his back. His own men saw that his efforts were bent at that time solely in the direction of the general welfare, and they helped him make the Nicaraguans see it too. The result was that a cholera-epidemic, which in the ordinary course of things would have decimated the military and civilian population of San Juan del Sur, was stopped and a composite force of Americans and Nicaraguans, which had hitherto subsisted in spite of mutual distrust, was welded into one good striking unit.

When thirty-five recruits arrived from San Francisco, Walker felt that he had a force under him that could tackle anything in Nicaragua, and without giving the new arrivals time to grow weary in cantonments, he started off at once to attack Grenada—the capital of the country, and the stronghold of the Clericals. He went prepared to put up the great fight of his life. On the journey he inspired his men deliberately with all that he could of his own daring spirit, giving them to understand that he would call on them for every generous spark of courage and devotion that was in them. And they rose to it, fired by his enthusiasm.

THE GENERAL

HE TOLD them to fight to orders, and to count on him for generalship, and trust him implicitly. They did trust him, and he did not fail them. He captured Grenada with a loss to his own force of only one man, and that man a Nicaraguan.

He outmaneuvered the Clerical army, outwitted it, ran round it, got behind it and got into Grenada almost before anybody realized what he was aiming for. In less than two hours it was Walker who was holding Grenada, and the defending-army that would have to attack it, if it wanted to regain possession. His own men were delighted with him. The inhabitants of Grenada realized that here at least was a man who could lead men, and who could not be worse than their erstwhile masters. The troops outside laid down their arms rather than fight a man with such a brain

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and such a reputation, and the citizens of Grenada called a public meeting, and offered him the presidency out of hand!

Here Walker showed diplomacy, and something else that was not quite so praiseworthy. General Corral, who had been his nominal commander ever since he came to Nicaragua, had done nothing, at least overtly, to undermine him or to cause him to entertain distrust. But he seems to have determined then and there to get rid of General Corral. And with that end in view, and as a preliminary step toward it, he declined the presidency in favor of General Corral.

He sent for Corral, and the two drew up a formal treaty, under the terms of which Corral was declared President of Nicaragua, and Walker its Secretary of State for War and Commander-in-chief. The treaty was ratified by a hastily convened assembly, and after that the two men rode round the public square side by side, saluted by the troops and bowing in answer to the cheers of the delighted populace. Nicaragua seemed due for a breathing-spell at last, and Walker was welcomed unreservedly as a man who would bring her "peace, prosperity and happiness."

But they had yet to learn the real Walker. They had only known the apparently quixotic and devoted deliverer as yet. Now that his power was greater even than the President's, the country began to writhe under the iron hand of Walker the despot. He placed the men who had formed the famous Phalanx in all the most enviable positions under Government, and with their aid he began to impose his own ideas—unalterable, unbendable and usually unjust—on the whole of Nicaragua.

He fell foul, almost instantly, of the neighboring republic of Costa Rica, and of the almost all-powerful Vanderbilts, who owned the transcontinental transit-route franchise and much of the shipping that plied along the coast. The Vanderbilts offered the Costa Ricans moral and material support—moral with their own government, and material in the form of arms and ammunition. The Costa Ricans made representations to President Corral, reasonable representations that any fair-minded man must have given ear to.

When Corral seemed disposed to meet them at least half-way, Walker promptly charged him with conspiracy. He took the law into his own hands, summoned a court martial, at which he himself presided, tried Corral, forced the court to find him guilty, condemned him to death and had him shot immediately.

THE YANKEE PRESIDENT OF NICARAGUA

NOW Nicaragua was at his feet. He had himself proclaimed President immediately, and Costa Rica and the other neighboring republics began to tremble for their safety. The Vanderbilts began sending Minie rifles by the ship-load at a time to Costa Rica, and Colonel Doubleday—Walker's best friend up till now—remonstrated with him. He explained that he would find himself contending with the declared hostility of the world instead of one republic, and Walker's reply was characteristic of him.

"I am not," he said, with his chin uplifted, and his eyes ablaze, "contending for the world's approval, but for the Empire of Central America!"

That finished Colonel Doubleday's connection with him. He admired him, and had been prepared to risk his life and fortune under his command so long as he had been able to believe that Walker was quixotically fighting for the liberty of a defenseless population. He was still able to write of him that "he was a brick, and brave as a bear;" but he felt forced to leave him when his real ambition stood declared. Doubleday went back to San Francisco, and Walker lost the services of a man who had been his stoutest supporter.

For the time being, though, he still had things all his own way. Costa Rica was the republic next to Nicaragua that was likely soonest to feel the weight of Walker's heel; and the Costa Ricans were being egged on by the Vanderbilts. So on April 11, 1856, a Costa Rican army three thousand strong invaded Nicaragua, with the avowed intention of exterminating Walker and his "plundering filibusters." They judged the moment opportune, as Walker was still new to the Presidency, and had not yet got his hooks into the country's vitals. But Walker judged the moment opportune as well. He called his old Phalanx round him, together with as many native troops as he could raise, and started off to meet the Costa Ricans and teach a lesson to the whole of Central America.

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He taught them the lesson, too! He met the Costa Ricans on old fighting-ground of his, and routed them completely at the second battle of Rivas. The enemy left more than six hundred dead on the field, and went scattering back in confusion to their own country, fully as convinced as Walker himself that destiny was fighting on his side. Vanderbilts or no Vanderbilts—moral and material support or not — William Walker quite plainly was too many for them, and they proposed to leave him where he was, as President of Nicaragua.

LOOT

THAT was the climax of Walker's career, and he proved too small for it, or too wrong-headed, or too blind. Recruits flocked to him in hundreds from America, and before long he had no less than twelve hundred men, well armed and drilled and loyal to him. He placed many of them in important Government positions and, not having anything but their own fortunes at stake, they began to loot. He deposed hundreds of native officials to make room for them, dispensing with the services of men whose families had held official posts ever since the days of the Spanish conquest; and when they remonstrated with him he told them sternly that men of "Spanish blood" were "quite unfit to govern."

Very little of the revenue that was wrung by Walker's men from the impoverished country found its way into Walker's treasury, and he soon began to be embarrassed for the lack of funds, and to set about taking very unwise measures for remedying matters. When merchants complained about his men's extortions, he answered their complaints by fining them. When they dared resist extortion of the fines, he confiscated their property. He even dared to abrogate the Vanderbilts' charter for the transcontinental transit-route, and he tried to run it, with conspicuous non-success, as a Government monopoly.

On the one hand he did well, for he sent a minister plenipotentiary to Washington, and contrived to have him recognized by President Pierce. He had his own Presidency duly recognized by more than one foreign power, and was enough of a diplomatist to jockey the United States Government almost into the position of a sponsor for him — thus offsetting the incessant vengeful activity of the Vanderbilts. But on the other hand he just as steadily undid the good that he had gained.

England was then at war with Russia in the Crimea, and there were no British gunboats to spare just then for cruising purposes in Central American waters. But there were English merchants with established businesses in Nicaraguan ports, and Walker taxed and fined and robbed those merchants with sublime impartiality and arrogance. They and the American merchants joined together for a combined remonstrance to Washington, and the British merchants managed in addition to procure the services of the British Ambassador to Washington on their behalf.

And as though it were not enough to antagonize the whole of the English-speaking world by high-handed robbery, he scandalized Central America and all civilization by proclaiming the legality of slavery, and allowing slave-markets to be established in Grenada and other cities. That culminating foolishness of his set against him the whole weight of public opinion in the northern United States, and did more even than the action of the British Government to force the United States Government into the lists against him. He could dare Great Britain—and did. He could even dare the United States—which was infinitely more dangerous if only because it was nearer to hand—so long as there was no real public sentiment against him. But his slavery-decree signed the death-warrant of his would-be empire.

ENGLAND SEARCHES

WHEN the Crimean War ended, Great Britain began to look into the matter of this William Walker. Gunboats and small cruisers began to hover near the Nicaraguan coast. Since the United States Government still seemed indisposed to interfere, the British Government claimed the outrageous, but exceedingly convenient, "right" to search ships on the high seas for contraband of war.

The United States Government had no desire to go to war with England, and England knew it. But, if the British gunboats confiscated the cargoes of American ships, there would be something almost amounting to a state of war forthwith. The best way to prevent that was to inspect

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carefully the crews and cargoes of all ships leaving American ports, so that the English would have no excuse for confiscating anything. Walker's supply of recruits began to fall off from that moment. Had his slavery-decree not set public opinion in America against him, it is probable that the American Government would have taken other means of dealing with the British "right of search;" but no Government dares act against the expressed feeling of more than half a nation.

Although apparently at the height of a victorious career, Walker was in reality getting very near the end of it. Demoralized by plunder and high living, the men who had once formed his invincible Phalanx, and still more the men who had flocked to his standard later, had become lazy and indifferent. Half of them were wise enough to realize that no rule such as Walker's could last indefinitely. Half of them filtered back to San Francisco with the loot that each had garnered. The other half—the men who had joined later, for the most part—were too busy wringing, squeezing, pounding the loot out of a nearly beggared population to pay any attention to the signs of the times.

And Walker was far too blind, quite too filled up with a sense of his own destiny and prowess, to realize how matters stood.

The Vanderbilts were his keenest, deadliest enemies. They had been robbed of what was theirs by right of purchase and up-building, and they were not at all disposed to take their gruel lying down. Insistently, continually, they kept on shipping rifles and ammunition into near-by states, for use against Walker when the time should come; and their emissaries kept on preaching a "jehad" against the tyrant who was sucking the country dry and giving it back nothing in return. Nobody accused Walker of looting for his own pocket or even benefit. His honesty was taken for granted. They accused him of permitting loot, and of scheming to get control of all Central America.

The steady campaign of preaching and preparation bore its fruit, and suddenly—with barely any warning—Nicaragua rose. Walker found himself at bay in Grenada, with only a remnant of the Phalanx at his back, and a handful of frightened plunderers. It was the same Walker—a firebrand again, now that he was called upon to fight instead of rule—but the Phalanx he had drilled, and on whose back he had ridden into power, was the Phalanx no longer. The neighboring republics helped Nicaragua, and Walker's scattered detachments, loyal men and men who fought for him to save their skins, were cut up one by one. He sent to San Francisco, to Colonel Doubleday, and asked him to come to his aid again; and so great was Doubleday's regard for him that he actually got together a relief-column and made efforts to reach him.

Doubleday had consistently refused to be a party to his schemes of empire, and had left him at the moment when they began to develop. But, now that Walker was fighting a losing fight with his back against a wall, he tried to hurry to his aid, and actually fought his way half of the distance to Grenada. He could get no farther, though, and after desperate fighting against odds, he was forced to return to the coast again, wounded and nearly dead from fever.

After that Walker burned Grenada, since he could not hold it, and began to cut his ferocious way to the coast and safety. Such was his determination, so great the fear of his prowess as a fighter that he had instilled into the Nicaraguans, that even with such a pitiable remnant of a force as still was true to him, the revoltos were unable to kill or capture him. He reached the coast unharmed, and since even he could see now the hopelessness of further effort for the present, he made up his mind there and then to quit the country.

The opportunity was handy. There was a United States sloop of war, the *Mary*, in the harbor, and her Commander was unlikely to refuse shelter to Americans. So on May 1, 1857, after a final consultation, Walker climbed on board the *Mary*, accompanied by sixteen of his officers, and surrendered to Commander Charles H. Davis. He surrendered, too, with such dignity, and with such assurance, that Commander Davis felt compelled, not only to admire him, but to treat him as an honored guest.

So ended Walker's one great effort. He started penniless, fought his way to a presidency and ended penniless. He had not one cent with which to bless himself when he reached New Orleans; and there, though an attempt was made to try him, there

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seemed no charge on which he could be tried. So they bound him over, like a common rowdy, to keep the peace!

RAGS OF EMPIRE

DOZENS of other men had grown rich by following him. Hundreds of them had gained a competence for life. Only Walker the visionary—the hot-headed, lion-hearted little firebrand; the man who had had the pluck to lead the others—was a pauper, and a prisoner with nothing to show for all he had done.

But he was not done yet. He made three more attempts to win that empire that he dreamed of.

First, with a sentence hanging over him in New Orleans, he claimed that he had "rights" in Nicaragua. As its deposed President he claimed that he was justified in planning his return, and he found plenty who agreed with him, although they were far from being the type of men that he had welded into his famous Phalanx. These were men who made no pretense of being anything but out-of-works, or political hangers-on, who asked only a chance to seize what was not theirs. They cared neither for Walker nor for Nicaragua. But they were ready to go with him, on the off-chance of a little plunder. And with his usual sublime refusal to recognize the evidence of his own senses, Walker was content to lead them, though he knew—he must have known!—that expeditions made up of dock-rats and ward-heelers are foredoomed to failure.

In November, 1857, he was back in Nicaragua. But his new command was useless, and he could do nothing with it. Not even Walker could make that crowd do anything but loaf and grumble and malinger. And on December the seventeenth, Commander Paulding of the United States Navy went ashore after him, and compelled him to surrender and return with him to New York.

He was charged this time with filibustering; but President Buchanan refused to recognize him as a prisoner, on the ground that his arrest on foreign soil had been illegal, and he was set at liberty again within a few hours after he had landed. There was a great deal of sympathy for him still, and more than a disposition to give him the benefit of technicalities.

THE HOUSE OF VANDERBILT

THERE were also in America men who still believed in him, just as there were still the Vanderbilts who detested him and a British Government that still claimed "right of search." The combination of Great Britain and the Vanderbilts foiled his next attempt. By October, 1858, he had secured fresh backing, and had got together another force of stalwarts, this time in Mobile, Alabama. Once more he set sail to claim, and if need be fight for, his alleged rights in Nicaragua. But the Vanderbilts got wind of his project in time, and represented to the United States Government that if his ship were allowed to go to sea, and were searched by a British gunboat, and munitions of war happened to be found on board, there were likely to be international complications of a serious and expensive nature.

The United States Government was never disposed to admit the British claim, and at that time was not anxious to force an issue, so the arguments of the Vanderbilt interests received a ready ear, and Walker was hauled up short at the mouth of the Mississippi River, and brought back again to New Orleans. He was tried once more, and acquitted of the charge of filibustering, on the ground that he was still in United States waters when arrested, that he had not yet filibustered and that he was quite within his rights in any case.

His money was all gone again, and his men dispersed, and it was not until June, 1860, that he was able to make one more, his last, attempt to regain what he had won and lost. He raised money from a coterie of get-rich-quick financiers, who were ready to take a cheap chance in a gamble for concessions, and set sail with a hastily recruited company of wastrels for Honduras. His intention was to conquer Honduras, or else to persuade the Hondurans that they needed him, and with their aid once again to invade Nicaragua.

He succeeded in effecting a landing at Trujillo and, from a dismal, swamp-surrounded spot up the Tinto River, he issued a proclamation against the Government. But his knell was already sounded, and destiny no longer seemed to fight for him. He had had his chance, and had thrown it away in Nicaragua and, like Napoleon the Great, once his decline of fortune had set

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in, he seemed unable to strike a winning streak again.

The men he had with him were dock-rats and criminals of the worst; they were afraid of the mosquitoes and the fever, and even more afraid of what the Hondurans might do to them in the event of defeat. No Hondurans rallied round him in answer to his call to arms. There was no enthusiastic answer now to his stirring speeches to his men. He seemed to have lost his grip, and even he—William Walker the irrepressible—began to be despondent.

At the gloomiest moment, when he had tried to rouse his disheartened men to action and had failed, the British man-of-war *Icarus* put in an appearance, and her Commander demanded Walker's immediate arrest. The Hondurans, knowing Walker's reputation, declined to attempt it, but invited the *Icarus's* Commander to help himself. He offered amnesty, and Walker, half driven and half persuaded by his hopeless command, consented, and on the third day of September, 1860, he and his men all went on board the *Icarus*.

What followed is not a credit to Great Britain. The Honduras authorities, having no reason to be afraid of Walker any longer, demanded his surrender to them as an offender against their laws. Without the least demur, and in spite of his promise of amnesty which under the circumstances certainly must be held to have included protection, the British Commander handed him over, and Walker went ashore, quiet and dignified, to what he must have known would be his death.

He would not even deign a defense before the court martial that sat to try him. He contended that since he had surrendered to the British and they had accepted his surrender, the Hondurans had no jurisdiction over him. And his contention was undoubtedly correct. He treated the whole of the court-proceedings with calm and dignified contempt, refusing even to plead, knowing as well as the British Commander must have known that the finding of the court would be a foregone conclusion. He was sentenced on the evening of the first day of the trial, and at daybreak on the twelfth of September, 1860, he was shot.

SO DIED A MAN

SO DIED Walker, friendless and a failure. For a man of thirty-six he had seen more than his share of life. He had made, and cast aside, more stanch friends than most men have, and he had more than one man's share of enemies. He met the death that he himself had meted out to his friend Corral, and he certainly deserved to die, even if not at the hands of the men who killed him. He had trampled rough-shod on a nation's rights and a nation's prejudices, and he had ruthlessly subserved men's lives and fortunes to the furtherance of his own ambition. But——

He was a man. He made men love him, and he led them where they dared not have gone alone. He dared Great Britain and the United States and Porto Rico, and held down Nicaragua while he did it. And from first to last he kept his hands and his reputation clean of any suspicion of graft or vice or pettiness. There are not many men who have been conquerors and can lay claim to that distinction.

His chief fault was his intolerance. He could not—would not—see that other men's opinions were sometimes honest, sometimes worth listening to, sometimes as valuable as his own, or that, even if he were the man of destiny that he believed, other men than he had rights.

He had all of Napoleon's fire, and all of his ambition. But he lacked the Corsican's breadth of view and statesmanship. So, unlike Napoleon's, but like a jungle puma's, his trail is a closed one—grown over and forgotten like the one-time trails he cut through the forests of Nicaragua.

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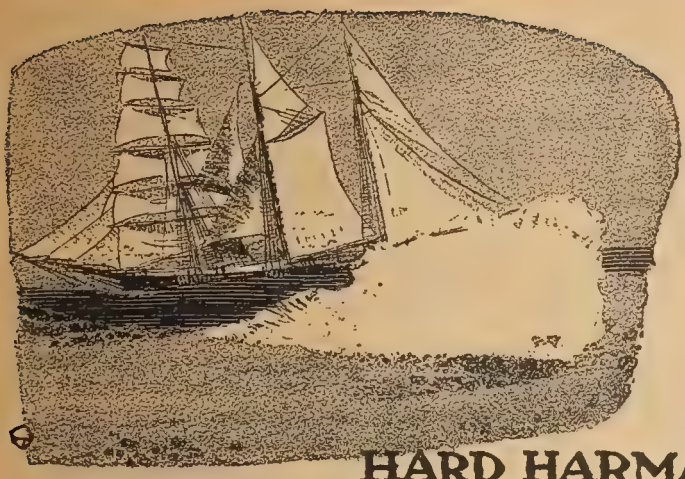

HARD HARMAN: A SOUTH SEAS ROVER of the '40's

by

Dan. L. Silverling

THE *Anna Lee* lay in Gibraltar Bay, swinging at her moorings off the ragged staff-landing. We—the skipper and his crew—sat on the quarter-deck under the awning, sheltered from the scorching heat of the sun. Everything was snug below and taut above and we but awaited our clearance-papers to drop down the bay and head out for Funchal.

There was not a man of us but had bunked in almost every port of the world, and our conversation had been mainly about the strange experiences we had encountered between voyages, but finally it veered around to a discussion of whether one could always judge a man's fighting-abilities correctly by his physical characteristics.

Bedell, the first luff, held that he could tell a fighter the moment he clapped eyes on him.

"Show me a man," he went on, warming to his opinion, "with a square-cut jaw, high cheek-bones, eyes deep-set under heavy brows, atop a body that's stocky with broad, high shoulders and feet that stay where they're put, and ninety-nine times out of a hundred he's a fighter. He just can't help fight. Even if he has only the face, he has the fighting-spirit, and will wade in against any kind of odds. But if he has a weak face, no matter if he's as strong as a bull, he won't fight any more than a worm."

We of the crew listened with approval while he expounded his theory, but when he had finished the skipper voiced a dissent in his characteristic non-argumentative tones.

Captain Harter was an old man, close on to seventy. He had been educated at Annapolis and, despite the hard, rough life he had led on the sea and in out-of-the-way, half-civilized countries, his language and manner gave evidence that there had once been a polish so well put on, that, though worn off in spots, much of it still clung.

He liked to mingle with his crew and would go to a good deal of trouble to get men above the average in seamanship and general education. Once a man sailed with him he never left of his own accord and any change in the crew was an event on board.

He was known personally or by hearsay to every man who "went deep-sea" from Suez to Singapore and back again around the world. "Hongkong Harter" some called

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him, and spoke with awe of the wild doings with which he was credited, when in his younger days he sailed out of far eastern ports.

I had been his second mate for two years, and during the long dull watches of the night many were the marvelous tales of depredation and daring he had told me, mixed with interesting observations of the philosophy of life as he had found it. So now, when he spoke, I lent an attentive ear.

"RECOLLECT two years ago," he began, "when we lay in Suez, of a youngish-looking old man coming aboard and throwing his arms around me for sheer joy at finding me alive? He was rigged in white flannels, carried a cane, had a face like an old-time spinster and was as soft-spoken as he was soft-looking. Recollect him?"

We nodded our affirmations.

"Well, was he a fighter?"

"No," declared Bedell. "He just couldn't fight with that face and build. Why he'd run if a swarm of ants were headed his way. I could shoo him away like I would a chicken that got too pert."

"There's where you're wrong," said the old man, reminiscently. Then, after a moment, "that was Dan Harman—'Hard Harman' they used to call him—and he was sure the hardest fighter among hard-fighting men when we sailed the South Seas some forty years ago. I've owed my life a score of times to his fearlessness and ability. If there was anything to be gained by it, he'd rush in where angels 'd fear to tread, and I never knew the time when he didn't bring home the bacon. No, not once. He was a wonder—a born fighter, you can bet your life, but not a scrapper. He was never looking for trouble, but when it came his way he could take care of it and everything and everybody that went with it to the queen's taste. His body wasn't puny, even if his face was thin. He was the most deceiving man with his clothes on you ever saw."

"Let's hear a yarn about him, Captain," I ventured.

"Well, I guess there'll be no harm in that. He's dead now and left no folks; cashed in shortly after you saw him. But anyhow there's nothing to tell that isn't to his everlasting credit."

Musingly, he began the yarn:

CRIME is largely geographical. Many a man's serving time in different parts of the world to-day for things that in other times and other places would only have earned him the title of hero.

It seems as if people have just got to have heroes. If they can't get the real thing, they're going to manufacture 'em out o' what materials they've got. With nearly every spot on earth civilized and all this talk o' universal peace, they're turning to the second-story workers and confidence-men. After a while I suppose they'll take in the grafters and pickpockets. Goodness! But that's a far cry from the spoils of war and adventure taken in the open.

But Dan Harman was different from any of these. He led a wild life in wild times, but he hated bloodshed and even more he hated trickery. He never defied the law for his own ends, nor robbed any one, but the way things were those days, before England asserted her rule in the East, it was sometimes necessary to take the law into one's own hands to kind o' even things up.

If Dan were living in New York to-day and needed the money, you'd never find him in any high-finance hold-ups or confidence-games. No siree. It'd be hard to tell what he'd do, but it wouldn't be anything like that. Like as not he'd be burning midnight oil in a hall-bedroom, pushing a pen and leaving behind a trail of our adventures in the South Seas that'd hold the hero-worshippers for a while.

But seeing as he's not here to write 'em and it'll probably be quite a spell before the papers come aboard, I'll tell you about the first time he saved my life, and when I'm through I'll ask Bedell whether Dan could fight or not.

It was in Hongkong I first met him. The brig *Seton* brought me in, and he dropped off the old wind-jammer *Cuttledory*, that went on the rocks off Liverpool a few years ago. We met ashore, saw the town together, missed ship and from then on kept in pretty close touch until he left the sea ten years ago.

We were about the same age—along pretty well in the twenties—and were both from the United States, he from Down East and I from the Middle West. He'd been through college and afterward started to rough it on a trip around the world, and became so attached to the wild life that he couldn't be induced to give it up.

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He looked much the same as when you saw him, except that his gray hair was a new-rope yellow and the muscles that bound his frame together were as vibrant and strong as piano-wires imbued with life, and you can bet all you've got, he could play 'em high or low, soft or loud, as he pleased, just whichever way suited the subject best.

Those were wild days. Hongkong wasn't the sedate English-ruled port it is now. It was the toughest place in the Far East, well off the edge of civilization. The scum of the earth was gathered there. Soldiers of fortune, Russian renegades, Malay cut-throats, opium-smugglers, escaped convicts from Australia, Dutch traders—a jumble of all kinds of men from different parts of the world, most of whom were seeking cover for one reason or another, walked about its dirty streets.

They were sure a reckless, devil-may-care crowd of adventurers and fortune-seekers, none of whom cared much for human life and least for his own. It was a regular Sargasso Sea of human derelicts, drifted there from the four corners of the earth.

Everybody was stealing from somebody else. A highway-robbery sort of trade was going on all the time. Things changed hands without any pretense of a money-transaction. If you could get away with a thing, it was yours, just like a bluff in a poker-game, and if the man you stole it from wanted it back he had to work a slicker game than you had.

It was a case of who was the smartest crook, and the one who was cleverest at stacking the cards took the pot. Not so different from the way they do some things nowadays and in places nearer home than Hongkong, only this was open and above board, and every one knew the game he was up against. Eternal vigilance was the price of keeping what belonged to you. It mattered not if it were a keg of whisky or a full-rigged ship. "Take a chance and everything that goes with it" was the watchword and the basis on which all business was done.

The Malay pearl-fishers were considered lawful prey, but if you went south among the islands with the intention of getting a hatful of pearls, you might have to clean up a few of the squint-eyed cannibals, and in return take a chance of having your head hacked off with a rusty cutlass or blown away by a blast from an old-fashioned musket, jammed to the nozzle with nails, pebbles and broken shells.

Every once in a while a pearl-hunting expedition went out. Some came back and some didn't, but when one did, and successful—well Hongkong made a Wild West rumpus, even of those days, sound like a Methodist prayer-meeting in comparison. It was hell—just plain hell with the lid off, with the devil serving the drinks, and you can bet the timid ones took to cover like a fishing-fleet before a nor'easter.

IT DIDN'T take Dan and me long to catch the spirit of the time, for we hadn't been ashore twenty-four hours until we had been relieved of everything of value about us, and it wasn't much longer before we were needing something badly to keep from dropping our mud-hooks in the port o' dead men, for want of the necessities of life.

We weren't the only ones traveling light amidships. We ran across a trio that were running without cargo or ballast, looking for something that somebody wasn't watching all the time. They were ordinary British seamen, but they'd been there for some time and could give us pointers that otherwise we could only have learned from experience. They were known respectively from the leader down as Red Rooney, Happy and Scuttle, but, as they were inseparable, Dan and I always referred to them as the "trio."

We joined forces with the idea of mutual protection and, under Dan's leadership, got odd jobs on the docks, so that we were able to fire up and get our boilers going steady again. All the while we were on the lookout for a decent opportunity to get away.

One day when we called at the consulate for mail, Dan was handed a long legal-looking envelope and a smaller one with a black border. He opened the latter with trembling fingers and, while reading it, dropped the other unheeded to the floor, then without noticing it or me, crushed the one he had read in his hand and walked rapidly away. I picked up the long envelope and followed him, but at a distance, as his actions showed that he wanted to be alone.

He walked for miles, and I tagged on as far behind as would permit me to keep him in view. He finally reached an open space

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on the outskirts and disappeared behind some bushes. I followed, cautiously, and saw that he had thrown himself face-downward on the ground. His shoulders were heaving like a man shaken by some strong emotion, but there was no sound.

I walked a short distance away and waited. It was an hour before he came out, showing not a sign of the stormy weather he had run into. I gave him the long envelope and, after he had read the contents, he handed both letters to me and told me to read them. It took but a few minutes to understand the whole situation. His father and mother had died within a few days of each other, was the gist of the black-bordered sheet, and the legal communication set forth that, in compliance with his father's will, all cash on hand was to be divided immediately between his three daughters and Dan.

A man from the law-firm was at once sent on the trail of Dan with his share, amounting to thirty thousand dollars. As the lawyer would probably not be far behind the letter, when we returned to the consulate we were not surprised to find him awaiting the heir in the consul's private office. Before the day was over, Dan was in full possession of his inheritance.

He at once announced his intention of buying a trading-schooner and asked me to go into partnership with him, offering to let me pay for my interest out of the profits. I accepted his proposition, until I could turn some property I had in America into cash. After we had discussed our plans and shaken hands on the agreement, we hunted up the trio and enlisted them as members of the crew. All that we needed further was two more men and the schooner.

The trio almost immediately called our attention to a three-masted schooner which had cast anchor that day. They had seen the Dutchman who owned her come on shore with his crew. It was a nice schooner, a clipper-built ninety-footer, and as trim a craft as ever came off the ways. The only sign of life aboard was a Chinaman puttering about the deck, and the clean, compact lines of the vessel stood out in bold relief against the western sky, out of which the sun had just gone down.

"Perhaps you can buy her," suggested Happy.

"There comes the Dutchman now," said Red Rooney, excitedly, pointing to a rolling figure of enormous girth coming toward us. "Maybe he'll sell."

"No harm in asking," said Dan and, going up to the Dutchman, he engaged him in conversation.

He returned in a few minutes saying, "That's funny; he does want to sell. Says the schooner is too small for his trade and he's been negotiating, to-day, for that big packet out there. I told him we'd take the schooner if everything was satisfactory and my partner agreed."

"How much does he want?" I inquired.

"Five thousand pounds. Three thousand down and the balance in a year from date of sale."

"Dirt-cheap if everything's all right," I replied. "Don't see how he can afford to do it. Looks suspicious."

"He says he can make a better bargain for the packet with that much more ready cash, and he has a big contract pending which, if he can handle it at once, will net him half the value of the schooner. However, my lawyer will be here for several days, and he can look into it."

Well, to make a long story short, the Dutchman qualified as sole owner, and we bought the schooner the next day, with a stipulation for the Chinese cook and the privilege of signing up two of his men. The former owner and the balance of the old crew were to pack up and get off the following morning, as we were anxious to try our new possession on the high seas, and intended to weigh anchor at the earliest possible moment.

THAT night, Dan and I lay in our bunks till long after mid-watch discussing our plans. After we finally went to sleep, it couldn't have been more than a few minutes when I suddenly awoke to find one of the crew standing over me with a pistol while another was tying my ankles with a rope. The same operation was being performed on Dan, and after we'd been bound and gagged we were carried on deck and laid in one of the boats, where we found the trio awaiting us, but in no condition to extend a welcome.

We could hear the Dutchman giving orders, and presently the schooner was under way. Just at dawn we were lowered over the side and, as a nasty blow was stewing, we were anything but happy. Red Rooney hadn't been bound any too tight. He man-

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aged to work loose after a while, and soon had the rest of us free.

Needless to say, Dan had been relieved of the belt containing the balance of his money, so that now he was stripped of his inheritance as clean as a newly swabbed deck.

The Dutchman had considerately given us a chance for our lives by putting in the oars, food, water, our clothes and some blankets, so we managed pretty well, and it wasn't many hours until we were picked up and taken back to Hongkong. It didn't take us long to discover that we couldn't do a thing to the Dutchman, either civilly or criminally, even if we caught him. Not a paper that had been filed could be found. We went up against a blank wall at every turn.

Evidently everybody concerned had stood in with the Dutchman, and no doubt they all had a bunch of Dan's money in their pockets. The consul couldn't account for the disappearance of the papers. He threw up his hands in despair and said he might as well resign after he had made this report to Washington. His reports every month had consisted mainly of outrages on American citizens and, as he was powerless to stop them, he hoped some one would be sent to take his place.

Dan and I and the trio talked things over and vowed to spend the rest of our lives, if necessary, in finding the Dutchman and recovering the schooner and the money. We promised the trio a third interest in the schooner if we were successful.

We discovered that we weren't the only suckers the Dutchman had sold that schooner to, though he had probably never before had one swim unbaited into his net. But easiest caught is sometimes hardest held, and we determined that before he got through with us he would conclude that he had caught a school of bull-whales instead of a bunch of suckers this time.

Our plan was to slip on some vessel trading between Hongkong and other ports and to keep a sharp lookout. We figured we were bound to come up with the Dutchman sooner or later. We had no trouble in securing berths, and for the next three months we had pretty hard lines and never a sign of the Dutchman or the schooner.

It was quite discouraging, but not one of us ever suggested giving up the chase. I reckon Dan's thoughts were taken up pretty much all the time with how his father and mother had slaved to get that thirty thousand dollars for him, and I'd got to know him well enough by this time to feel sure that the stern lines that had settled about his mouth would never relax and the hard gleam that had come into his blue eyes never soften, until he had them back.

AT THE end of the third month we put into Macao, badly crippled after a rough voyage. It didn't look as if the old tub would ever go to sea again, and we were paid off for full time and released.

After all we'd been through it seemed as if we just had to do something to relieve the tension or bust. I was never a hard drinker and Dan didn't touch a drop, but the trio started to hit the high places. They struck the water-front like a blazing meteor. There was no holding 'em, and Dan and I let 'em go their way.

Every one has a weakness, and both Dan's and mine was gambling, so we hunted up the speculation-parlors (Macao was then, as now, an Oriental Monte Carlo) with the idea of increasing the size of our rolls. But it was all the other way, and by Saturday—we had started Friday—we were high and dry without a dollar; stripped to the yards. We thought it was high time we looked up the trio. They had their wealth in belts around their waists, except what it was their intention to blow in, and it looked as if we would have to borrow enough from them to last until we made another strike.

The liquor they handed out in Macao was two-thirds shellac and the rest fight, and when we located the trio, which we very soon did, it was in the gutter in front of a Japanese shack, dead to the world and badly battered up. They were joyful looking propositions and not much to choose among them. Eyes swollen, lips puffed and split, and noses battered chunks pasted against black and blue and red landscapes. Worst of all, their belts were gone and pockets absolutely empty. It took some time and much water to get any signs of life from them, but finally all three sat up and looked at us, stupidly at first, then broke into maudlin ejaculations of joyful recognition, mixed with demands for a drink. They were all hatless and bootless, and the ragged remnants of their clothes clung to them like fringe-grass to a cow-whale's back.

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We got them on their feet and made them wade knee-deep into the sea and bathe their battered faces. The sting of the salt water sobered them somewhat, and we all sat down on the beach and looked each other over in silent disgust, after we had broken to the trio that we also lacked the price of the drink for which they had kept up a constant clamor.

After we had taken our fill of silent expressions of our opinions of each other, we turned and gazed sadly off to sea.

Three hundred feet off shore lay the schooner! Her stacks had been lengthened a bit and she'd been rigged with a spinnaker-boom. The nozzle of a six-inch brass swivel-gun protruded over her bows, and the deck was littered with boxes, casks and barrels which were being stowed by four men under direction of a fifth. It was a pretty safe bet that the boxes contained guns and cutlasses; the casks, powder and shot and the barrels, grub.

I don't know which of us noticed her first, probably all at the same instant, for suddenly the five of us turned as one man, looked at each other, grinned—then, without speaking, again turned our eyes in the same direction.

"Nice schooner," said Dan finally, not withdrawing his gaze.

"Correct," said I, similarly fascinated.

"Looks as though she were going somewhere," he offered presently.

"She does that," I agreed. "What do you think about it?" to the trio.

"Right you are," they responded in unison.

There was another long silence as we watched the activities aboard.

Presently I heard Dan mutter, more as though he were thinking aloud than speaking to any one:

"Cannon, cutlasses, guns and grub."

Then, after a pause, turning to me, "Looks as if she were being fitted out for a cruise among the islands."

"Pearls?" I suggested, inquiringly.

"Pearls," he acquiesced, softly.

"That's what," said Red Rooney and the other two sent back the echo.

Then we all regarded each other intently, as though each were trying to read the other's thoughts, the trio's eyes making mute appeal for some one to start something.

"Why not us?" Dan finally broke the silence.

"Just what I was thinking," chorused the rest of us eagerly.

"We'll need a couple o' more men to sail her," said Dan.

"We kin stop somewhere and git 'em," suggested Red Rooney.

That night, about four bells of the midwatch, five dripping figures, stripped to the waists and gripping clasp-knives in their teeth, rose from the waters 'neath the schooner's bow and silently followed one another up the anchor-chain, a tow-headed fellow in the lead. Before the last man had reached the deck, the night-watch had been gagged and bound, and ten minutes later he, with four other would-be pirates, awakened from pearl-studded dreams, were lying helpless and silent in one of the boats, which we lowered over the side. We treated them better than they had us for, besides putting in the necessaries, we left them where they could easily reach the shore.

They told us that the Dutchman had gone ashore for the night, so we were compelled to let him go for the present. Anyhow, it was now up to him to find us.

The Chinese cook was right glad to see us and laid out a nice spread from the stores which had just come aboard, but, before eating, we got the schooner under jib and spanker and headed out to sea, while we sheeted home the topsails main and fore.

AFTER clearing the bay we ran sou'east through the Ladrones, then headed her due south through the China Sea. For four days we held her nose straight into the south and on the morning of the fifth, just as the sun was breaking the mist, we raised land off the port bow. We figured it to be Sampanmangio Point on the north of Borneo and accordingly we threw her head into the sou'east and ran for Sambas, where we calculated we could pick up a man or two.

Ever been in Sambas? No? Well, it's no place for a white man: a jumble of straw-thatched mud huts huddled around the Dutch Government-House, in the midst of a malaria jungle between the sea and the great swamp that covers the sou'east of Borneo. Great gray skinks wallow in the stagnant pools or drag their slimy lengths through the ankle-deep mud of the streets, and repulsive tiger-snakes and black teguses bask in the scorching sun in armed-truce harmony with gray death-adders.

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From break of day till sundown, when they seek their holes, the town is given over to these reptiles of the near-by swamp. But when the sun sinks over far-off Sumatra, bathing the islands in one last burst of softened sunlight, the town turned into a bedlam of half-naked, jabbering natives, drunken beach-combers, parboiled Dutch traders and millions of huge sand-fleas and mosquitoes which I'll bet take away a barrel or two of mixed blood every night.

As I said, we headed in for this God-forsaken hole, and at noon next day made anchorage off the native village. We were flying the British ensign and as we swung to our moorings dipped to the Dutch frigate lying off the Government House. A death-like silence hung forbiddingly over the town. The only signs of life anywhere were aboard the frigate and a schooner anchored off to our left.

Dan and I rowed over to the frigate to find out what was the matter. They explained conditions as I've told 'em to you, and we returned to the ship agreeing with the natives that night made hideous with mosquitoes and sand-fleas, however big and thirsty, was to be preferred to a sun that burned into your very soul, with snakes usurping the right o' way, although we came pretty close to changing our minds before we got away.

After listening to our description, the trio readily agreed to forego their anticipated shore-leave and remain in charge of the schooner, keeping things in readiness for a quick getaway. As soon as the lights began to show and we could see figures dribbling here and there from the doorways, we went ashore in the dingey and picked our way gingerly through the muddy streets, fearful that some adventuresome reptile had decided to stay in town and see the sights.

We had found a bag of milreis on board, and our pockets were weighted down with the big silver disks, which we hoped would aid us to find our men quickly, so that we could get away before the authorities got suspicious and asked questions. But it took us several hours to make the rounds, and we hadn't found a single sailor nor any promising material for the making of one. There wasn't anything there to tempt a man to miss ship. No one who wasn't compelled to would stay there a minute after he could get away.

We were standing outside a rum-shack talking it over, and had about decided to return to the schooner and move on to some other place, when we heard a commotion down the street. The moon was up and in her third quarter, and we could see a crowd coming toward us, headed by four men in the uniforms of the island-constabulary and a great burly tub of a Dutchman. As they got up to us we could see in their midst three figures, bound and hobbled, doing their best to keep up with the pace in response to proddings with their clubs from the constables and curses from the Dutchman.

"The trio!" we exclaimed together.

DAN didn't hesitate a minute.

"Sail in," he gritted, "and as soon as they're down help loose the trio and run for the dingey. I'll be right after you."

As the last word left his lips he swung his right with a terrific crash on the jaw of the nearest constable, and almost at the same instant I performed a similar operation on the one nearest me. They both dropped like logs and we had only two more and the Dutchman to negotiate, for the crowd stood back and watched the battle, the same as citizens of any place look on at a clash with the authorities.

The Dutchman was no coward and, before I could recover my equilibrium after giving the blow to the constable, he was on me and bore me to the ground by the mere force of his great weight.

"You murdering pirates!" he howled, and called for some one to get a rope. In desperation, I gathered all my muscles for a mighty effort, and succeeded in rolling partly over with him and freeing my arms, while his right became imprisoned by his own body.

Another heave and a push with both hands against his chest and I sprang erect. He was too clumsy to rise quickly, and I quieted him with a terrific kick on the back of his head as he was struggling to get on his feet. I hated to do it, but things looked pretty serious for us.

Dan had grabbed a club from each of the fallen constables and, with blood streaming down his face, and lips drawn back in a set grin, he was working them like the blades of a two-way propeller, warding off the attacks of the two constables, and with eyes alert for an opening. Even as I rushed to his assistance, one of them sank to his knees,

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then suddenly sprawled on the ground.

"The trio!" gasped Dan.

They were crouched in the doorway of the rum-shack, watching the battle with agonized faces, and struggling frantically to loose their bonds.

I sprang toward them, opening my clasp-knife as I ran, and as quick as you could let fly a halyard, I had them loose, at the same time telling them to run for the dingey and have it ready for Dan and me to jump in.

But it was too late. For at that moment the balance of the constabulary-force, ten or fifteen strong, came rushing up and we were quickly overpowered, securely bound and thrown in the mud in the middle of the street. They carried away the wounded and left us lying there in charge of one of the constables, to whom the chief gave some instructions which I could not hear. Two more constables were set to patrol in a circle around us, going in opposite directions, to see that no one came near us.

Now that the wounded were gone, I saw that there were only four of us, and I looked to see which one was missing. It was Dan! I could only conjecture what had become of him, but it seemed possible that he had got away and that the reënforcement of the constabulary, not knowing how many of us there were, had not missed him, or he might have been killed or badly wounded and been taken away. As I said, I could only conjecture, and a whispered consultation with the trio showed that they knew no more than I did what had happened to him.

Things looked pretty black for us. In fact our situation was about as desperate as it could be. I could not understand then why they did not put us in the jail, but Dan told me afterward that it was because it was overcrowded, as it usually was, and this gave the brutal officials excuse to torture prisoners by letting them lie in the open, bound, at the mercy of the mosquitoes and sand-fleas by night and the poisonous reptiles from the swamp by day. Almost incredible but true, and as you see me here alive to tell the tale, you know I escaped, but it was a pretty close shave and no thanks to them. As it was, we experienced all the horrors except the mere fact of dying, which would have been welcomed as a relief if help hadn't come when it did.

Now that the excitement had died down, the mosquitoes and sand-fleas began to get busy, and in our helpless state they found an opportunity they seldom had to indulge in fiendish orgies of blood. Our clothes were little protection, and they settled all over our bodies by the thousands, crowding each other for room on the exposed places. The agony was terrible, and the only fight we could make was to roll around in the mud, I dug my head into it and, repulsive as it was, sunk my face in and turned my head this way and that in an effort to cover every part of it. The trio, needless to say, were doing likewise.

The guard seemed to be of the opinion that this was a circus arranged for his amusement and laughed heartily, calling to the men on patrol to come nearer so that they could get a view of our antics. They certainly must have appeared droll to any one hardened and cruel enough.

WELL, as I said, our situation was bad and getting worse every minute. We had to keep rolling and digging all the time, for as soon as we'd smother those on one side of us, a new swarm was on the rest of us, and they'd manage to get in some pretty devilish work before we could roll over again, bound as we were. To keep this up for a couple of hours was about the most exhausting thing I've ever done, and it seemed sometimes as if I'd just have to give up and let them finish me.

It was pretty bad poison they injected while they were taking out the blood, and I could feel myself swelling up all over my body. The trio, at first, kept up a constant and loud cursing, but I whispered to them to keep their strength, as they might need it in case Dan was at large and should find some way to help us.

That he was free was my only hope, and a pretty slim one, guarded as we were, but still a hope, and I clung to it as those mosquitoes did to our blood-vessels. It was all that kept me from giving up for, aside from that, I knew that death was only a matter of a few hours, and I urged the trio to depend on it and be ready for it.

The thought hadn't occurred to me as yet that if we survived till morning we would be left in the street at the mercy of the reptiles. It was too horrible to think of even those inhuman Dutchmen doing such a thing. But about mid-watch two constables came up to relieve the others, leaving only one on patrol. They stood talking

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for a few minutes and I gathered that their instructions were to retire at sunup.

They said the injured constables were in a bad way, and that being left in the street to be finished by the reptiles was only a small part of what we deserved. Then they all came over and each of 'em gave us a kick apiece to emphasize the expression of his opinion. None of the trio understood their mutterings, and I didn't tell them of the fate in store for us.

I didn't have much time to indulge in the pleasures of imagining those horrible creatures of the swamp disputing ownership of my body with the vampires then in possession, and I tried to put away the thought when it did come, but every once in a while it gripped me with a sickening sensation so paralyzing that I lost what little strength I had left, only to be whipped up to it again by the agony I was enduring. If it had not been for the repulsive horror snakes always give me, and especially that kind, a couple of good hard jabs from their poisonous fangs would have been far easier to endure than the torture of being drained of my blood drop by drop. But there was still the hope of Dan, and life looks promising at twenty-eight, so I fought on and gasped encouragement to the trio whenever I could spare a breath.

I could tell that it was near morning when the moon sank behind the cloud-bank on the horizon, leaving the islands in inky blackness until the sun should break. It was in this interval that help must come, if it came at all, and I told the trio to be prepared to obey orders strictly if anything happened.

And happen it did. We hadn't much longer to wait, either, for Dan had been holding off for this very interval of darkness —not that he had been idle the rest of the time either, as you will soon see.

So confident had my hope of him been that I was hardly surprised when a voice whispered in my ear, "Keep quiet and drink this."

At the same time I felt the mouth of a bottle pressed to my lips and, while I drank, I was conscious that his other hand was cutting my bonds.

"The guard is over talking to the patrol," he whispered. "Don't get up but keep moving same as you were. I've got to silence the guards, so that we can get away. No, leave it all to me. You're too weak, and there must be no mistake and no noise. Only be ready to go when I say the word, and without any questions. I'm going to stay here until the guard comes back, and then I'm going to give him a punch that'll keep him quiet for a while. Then I'm going to creep over and fix the patrol the same way. Don't worry; I won't fail. I'm all keyed up to it, and they're not expecting it."

At this moment the guard returned and kicked among us to see if we were there all right. It was so dark he couldn't distinguish details, not even that there were five figures instead of four, which fact Dan had counted on. He waited only until the guard's back was turned, when he was on him, swift and sure as the pounce of a panther, and in another moment there were again five figures in the mud, but the fifth wasn't Dan.

The whisky had sent fight coursing through my veins and it was all I could do to restrain myself, so I was glad when Dan gave me the bottle and a knife and told me to loose the trio and give them a drink and instructions while he crept over and attended to the patrol. We were to wait there until he returned, as he wanted to take no chances of our getting separated in the dark. By the time I had finished my work he was back, and a moment later five figures crept, four of them painfully, but all with the greatest caution, between the huts and down to the beach.

SILENTLY as shadows they waded into the sea and swam for a familiar schooner, lying five fathoms off the shore. An unseen hand slipped her cable and she floated gently toward the open sea with the outgoing tide, five dark figures clinging to her channels. As she reached the southern point her jib and spanker were sheeted home and a boat was carefully lowered over the side. Across the thwarts lay three figures, securely bound. Two wore the gray blouses of the constabulary. The other was a Dutchman with his head done up in bandages and minus a chamois belt he had worn next his skin! For the third time the schooner was ours.

Dan had run behind the huts just as the reënforcement came up, crept down to the beach and, not finding the dingey, swum out to the schooner, which had been left in charge of a single constable when the trio were taken off. Dan was quickly in possession, in his own inimitable way, and then

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lay in wait for whoever might come aboard, which same proved to be the Dutchman and another constable.

While the slow-moving Hollander was coming up the ladder, Dan engaged in a little set-to with the constable, who came first, and was through in time to assist the Dutchman, whose bandaged head deafened him to the noise, to the deck. The latter, thinking it was the constable, was still in the midst of his thanks when Dan laid him beside his silent companion, trussed them as comfortably as security would allow, then hunted up the Chinese cook, who expressed his delight, but showed no surprise at seeing him, nor made any complaint at being awakened and requested to prepare a meal.

I wonder what would have been the Dutchman's feelings if he could have seen us after we had recovered a little, gathered round Dan in the wheel-house, while he opened the chamois belt. It contained two thousand pounds in Bank of England notes and forty perfect pearls. And to think that that Dutchman had called us pirates!

AT THIS point in the skipper's narrative a hail came from a small boat putting out from the landing.

"Our clearance," said the skipper, rising. Then, looking at Bedell, he asked, "Was Harman a fighter?"

"I reckon he was," admitted Bedell.

The papers were tossed aboard and the skipper bawled, "On deck all hands! Stand by to up anchor!"

AT DUTCHY'S

by Lyman Bryson

IT WAS a wild night at Dutchy's place. If it had not been wild, with an inordinate amount of drinking and as many fights as were needed to keep the crowd interested, Dutchy would have been unhappy. He was a peace-lover himself and very domestic. That was why he wanted the roisterers to raise the roof from his mining-camp barroom. That filled his coffers and more money went home to Lena and the babies. A good night meant a surplus to be sent back to Pennsylvania: dolls and happiness for the babies, hats and contentment for Lena. She thought the place her Heinrich ran in Saltpeter Gulch was just the sort he had once run in Hillsville—a nice quiet biergarten where fat German farmers and their wives spent their Sunday afternoons. Heinrich saw no need of informing her that it was very, very different.

Because wildness helped the sale of whisky,

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Dutchy encouraged it judiciously. He had calculated very carefully just how much fighting and chair-smashing he could allow and have the fun of the fighting bring in a good profit over what was lost in broken furniture. He knew just when to step in and say, "Now, poys, vouldn't ve better stop now, *ja?*" Usually they stopped. When they did not, Heinrich, who was built like his divine progenitor Thor, picked up one or two of the combatants bodily and carried them out. No one ever used a shooting-iron on Dutchy. That would have been unprofessional. His strength, which rumor magnified, and his wooden-like phlegm protected him.

He loved a fight when others fought it, but no one had ever been able to draw him into a personal encounter. Red Lonegan, who was camp-bully in his own right, once filled up on liquor and announced that he was going to "clean up" on Dutchy. The miners tried to hold him back, calling attention to the powerful strength of the German as a warning and to his good nature as an admonition, but Red was determined. He had an argument which no one but Dutchy himself was to answer.

He walked into the bar with a crowd at his heels. Heinrich, smiling and bland, waited for their orders. When his whisky was upon the bar, Red lifted his glass and deliberately poured the liquor out upon the more or less polished bar-top. The others waited for Dutchy to say something, but he smiled and refilled the glass. Again, and this time with an insulting oath, Lonegan emptied his drink upon the bar. Without a word Heinrich filled it up. Lonegan lost his temper then completely.

"You big Dutchman," he shouted, "won't you fight?"

"Certainly not," said Heinrich.

"You're a coward!" yelled Red. "You big beer-drinkin' hunk o' sauerkraut, you're afraid to fight."

"Vell," said Dutchy, with a childlike smile, "vot if I am? Is that any of your pizness?"

That ended the fight ingloriously, and after that Red Lonegan boosted Dutchy's business at every opportunity. His usual manner of helping out was to make an honest, conscientious effort to drink all the whisky in the place in one night and to put on impromptu prize-fights with any one who cared to lend a fist.

THE night we began to tell about was one of Red Lonegan's nights. He came early with the intention of staying late, and he was filled with the lust of battle and the lust of liquor. Other miners, lean for excitement of any kind, a few merchants from the town, a few strangers and the bedraggled lights-o'-love that wandered in with the miners, made up the crowd. Heinrich beamed upon them with the true instincts of a host and a friend. He turned them loose in the dance-hall that was next to the barroom and set his waiters to work.

The fun in the ballroom was soon going like wild-fire. Dutchy could hear the shouts of laughter from the men and the high-pitched, mirthless clatter of the women. It all meant big sales, big profits—money. Dutchy was very happy. From the depths of his heart came a wave of gratitude to Red Lonegan for his persistent hilarity. That always kept the crowd going.

Occasionally Heinrich went to the door and looked into the dance-hall. Over the splintery floor reeled the flannel-shirted miners. Most of them were men in their prime, bearded and sinister. On the dance-floor they were clumsy and awkward, but their movements gave a hint of a different sort of action in a crisis. Lonegan was doing a few extra fancy steps for the crowd once when Dutchy looked in. A woman was with him, a woman with a fixed and open smile in which was no happiness or feeling of any kind. They whirled in the waltz at a tremendous rate. When he let go of her hands she laid hold of his tough beard and he swung her round, to appreciative laughter. Heinrich in the doorway clapped his fat hands happily. He went back to sit behind the bar.

All that blaze and tinkle sounded to him in an ever-returning refrain like a song of gladness from Lena and the kids. Five years before, when he had left them to come prospecting, they had been nothing but tow-headed, Teutonic babes. They cooed for their fat parents and with prodigal affection cooed also for any other large fat person who hove within their vision. By now they would be large enough to recognize and appreciate the father who loved them. That father, hearing the glasses clinking in the dance-hall, rejoiced.

As he sat there, thinking of the ones at home, dreaming over the money that crowd

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of drunken miners was pouring into his family treasury, there came a sudden lull in the noise. The old fiddle that supplied the music, together with the drum, to which the dancers trusted more, was still scraping, but the shuffle of feet had stopped. There were not so many loud laughs, nor such a brave clinking of glasses.

The old violin, squawking occasionally and wheezing in a thin and soulless sort of music, was playing "Home, Sweet Home." That was why the hush had fallen among the rough gold-seekers and their lightsome women. They were sitting down now, thinking of long-gone days and happier, sweeter scenes.

The sentimental heart of Heinrich, filled with the thoughts of Lena, swelled within him. He could see that little home so plainly. He could almost smell the cabbage and onions that came cheerily from the door. He imagined himself walking up the path and being met by one of the little towheads who ran at him and shrieked "*Vater!*" in wild delight. The strains of the old fiddle were tearing at his heartstrings. A fat hand reached up and splashed a tear from his nose.

He heard two men come slowly through the door out of the dance-hall and pass out. Two more followed and a woman, alone. These people walked very slowly, listening to the weary, sad complaining of the music.

The tune stopped, dying in a last long quaver. In the dance-hall was silence. No one laughed or applauded. No one shouted for more to drink.

Several more went out. They were good customers, too; Dutchy was dimly conscious of that. In the midst of his tears he realized that his crowd was going home. He glanced at the clock and saw that it was no more than half-past ten. For the first time since his place had been established he was losing his customers before the evening was well begun. He jumped up and rushed into the dance-hall.

"Vot's de matter?" he demanded of the fiddler and the waiters. "For why does eferbody go oudt?"

No one answered him. The old fiddler sat with his violin over his knees. His head was bowed in quiet pensiveness. His heart, like Heinrich's, had been filled with thoughts of another place, and he had stirred in the hearts of those outcasts a solemn memory that had soothed their wild hilarity and sent them home for one night of decency.

Heinrich thought of the lost nickels for the tow-headed babies. For the first time in his life, genuine anger flared in his fat chest. He cursed the quiet old fiddler and demanded to know who had told him to play "Home, Sweet Home." With the large end of his instrument the old man pointed through the doorway into the bar, where against the polished top leaned Red Lonegan. With bleary-eyed, maudlin sorrow, Red was weeping upon the mahogany.

Heinrich strode out to him and laid a heavy finger upon his shoulder.

"Dit you tell 'im to play dot?" he asked.

Red nodded.

"Vell den," said Dutchy, "ve'll fight."

Red—drunken, sorrowful and chastened—shirked the combat, but it was no use. The old fiddler came to the door and the waiters gathered round to view that short but terrific contest. Red was vicious enough when once he was pain-maddened by a heavy blow. He was the hero of a hundred knock-downs, but Dutchy could almost have spanked him like a child. When he rolled supine upon the sawdust floor, Dutchy, blinking hard with the one eye where Red had left his mark, picked up the form of his best friend and most liberal patron and carried him to the door. Swinging it open he dropped him into the night.

Then he came back and went behind the bar. From the drawer he took a brush and a bottle of whiting. Upon the bar-mirror he wrote this legend, which remained for many days:

HOME SWETE HOME AINT GOIN TO BE PLAYED IN THIS HERE BAR NO MORE BY NOBUDDY. DUTCHY.

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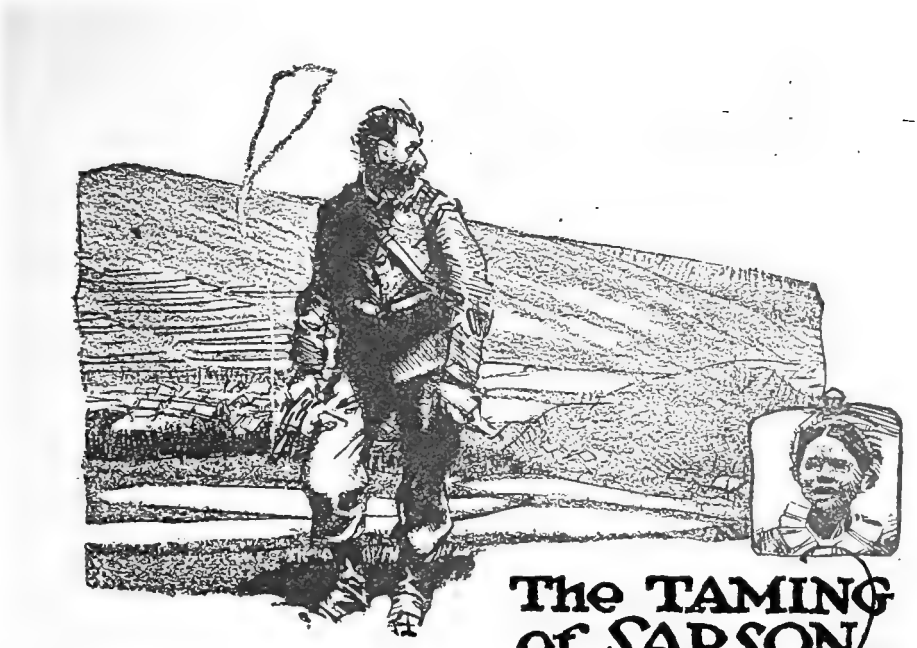

The TAMING of SARSON

by Charles Mortimer Cosby

IN THE company rolls it was plain Patrick Sarson, and sometimes, military routine making it imperative, he scrawled the same desperately, to the furtive derision of the top sergeant's clerk. But the enlisted men of the company called him "Red Sarson," and he answered, when surliness permitted a growl. His temper was as red as the coarse hair on his chest, and his memory is as a red fire that scorches the pride of the Moor.

Sarson came to the Engineers as a transfer from the Infantry—a burly, violent man with an apoplectic neck that squatted on thick shoulders—and because of a great strength and deftness was tolerated in an outfit where ability to hew out a stringpiece and lug it off counts for more than mere soldierly appearance. His only claim to fame was the stump of a right hand from which three fingers had been snipped in the hurried confusion of a night attack. His "bunkie," squirming under the folds of an upset tent, parried less fortunately and lost his life.

Although a prisoner in the guard-house, Sarson had rallied with the remnant and had used a shovel so effectively that his company commander reconsidered a plan to "bobtail" him, and allowed the transfer to the Engineers, it being hoped that the more arduous duties of the engineer-soldier would keep the Red One out of further trouble.

This tendency to trouble was the outgrowth of a black brooding grouch that Sarson nursed in idleness. It was a grouch that springs from no single cause but affects men strongly in the waste places, where the vague uncertainties and yearnings crystallize into a definite disease. Physicians call it nostalgia and dilate on the effects of homesickness in the tropics.

But Sarson had never known a home, nor a shelter, except such as he had won for himself. He owed his survival to the brutal fitness of the primitive. And his was a primitive grouch, relic of those days when the fulness of blood, bone and muscle left no room for nerves; just such a grouch as Adam must have felt before Eve came to make things interesting; a grouch born of solitudes, where neither wealth nor glory lie, where the sweat of the brow earns bread alone—unless we count a certain savage forgetfulness.

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And Sarson did count forgetfulness—forgetfulness of self. He wooed it strenuously. Anything was better than this blind hunger for things yet unrevealed. The vague, annoying, persistent desires kept him in a ferment of uneasiness. So he turned to work with sullen greediness, his freckled hide swelling with the vigor that was in it, nor rested even on the Sabbath day, when most men sprawled in the canvas laps of their folding-cots, grateful for a break in the grinding toil of opening new country. This restless effort to forget bewildering instincts that cried for recognition took him into trouble on a certain Sunday when Moro history was making.

AS HE stumbled out of a smothersome tangle of giant jungle-grass on the Iligan-Lanao military trail, dragging his gun carelessly even in a land where most men caress the trigger, a Moro —one of three that squatted in the shadow of the grass—was digging at his ribs with a native crooked dagger in the time that it took Red Sarson to wipe the sweat from his eyes.

Now a barefooted, active man, wielding a needle-pointed knife and projected suddenly upon an unwary person, usually has things all his own way, but Red Sarson was made of tougher stuff. The flimsy blade snapped off in the bone and muscle of his side and, bellowing bull-like, he went into action. Up and out leaped the steel-shod butt of his gun, kissing the Moro full in the face and messing it.

The impact of the blow shattered the weapon and rendered it useless as a firearm, but Sarson merely shifted his grip nearer the muzzle. He preferred it that way. The muzzle of a Krag is small and easily deflected when the target is hacking at one's head, but the splintered stump of a nine-pound gun drives true, shaking body and soul asunder. So Red Sarson settled for the fight, silent after the first roar of pained surprise, the knuckles of his mutilated hand whitening as he gripped the fragment of gun with angry eagerness.

The other Moros had scrambled to their feet as the fury of their comrade broke on the butt of Sarson's gun, but they did not attack at once. Instead they circled warily, astounded by the ease with which the Red One had thrown off what seemed to be sure death, and planning to meet strength with all the cunning skill of the jungle.

Suddenly one of them—a lithe-muscled little man with a double row of silver buttons down the front of his tight red jacket —darted in with a flashing thrust that rattled off Sarson's gun-barrel. As the soldier countered, the other Moro, using both hands, swung a barong with a mighty whirl that made the great blade sing. At about the same time a third Moro came pattering up the trail from somewhere beyond the bend where the tall grass had concealed his presence. Sarson greeted this fresh intrusion with a grunt of indignation, but was too full of rage to feel dismay.

For half an hour the battle raged, pivoting about Sarson in a cloud of dust, swinging in small circles to the ring of steel on steel, with now and then a softer sound as a blow went home. The Moros used every trick known to their fighting-trade and Sarson ducked, parried and countered with an agility remarkable in such a bulky man. It was a dance, a jamboree, a riot!

As the bugler sounded assembly for retreat, Red Sarson crawled into camp, a mutilated senseless thing that struck fretfully at the swarming flies. Slattery, the first sergeant, glimpsed this object out of the tail of his eye as it moved, a dark splotch in the golden glow that bathed the clearing.

Then he studied it more closely. There is something about a man struggling to succor that reaches out to grip the attention, even though the eye is at a loss to enlighten the mind. Slattery decided to investigate. To that end he detailed a corporal and a private. The latter came running back as the company broke up. He yelled as he ran.

"Sarson cut up," he said. "Get a stretcher, some o' you fellows! And get it quick! He's bad."

Immediately the place stirred with an awakening interest in things. Slattery brought order out of the confusion.

"Come back—fall in," he roared. "Now you, Clare and Johnston and Bell, get a stretcher and go back with Mertz. Tell the room-orderly to notify Doc Stader. Hustle it along, too!"

In less than twenty minutes Sarson was being patched up by Stader, the hospital steward, and along the military trail two parties were hurrying in opposite directions, one mounted and riding hard up the four-mile climb to Marahui, with orders to shoot

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anything that moved and failed to challenge; the others headed west, doubling back along Sarson's trail.

These latter moved in double file, a sergeant at their head, guns covering the thickets of grass on either side the road. They felt their way, as it were, for night had swallowed the land, blotting out all things, even the man who walked a foot ahead, and the pocket-lamp remained unlit except at rare intervals when it winked at the darkness. The sergeant, an old hand at the game, knew that such toys merely serve to blind those they are meant to assist, incidentally revealing the carrier to any enemy that happens to be lurking near-by.

The party moved without speech, for tired men, even those laboring under great excitement, talk but little on the hike, and do that little in grunts and monosyllables. Even that is eliminated when the hikers strain their ears for the stealthy tread of naked feet.

As they swung along at a rapid walk, something happened that brought them to a quick halt without command. Sergeant Clermont had stumbled. He recovered himself with a forward bound and wheeled sharply as he landed, firing-piece unlocked and trigger-finger ready. Each man crouched as though he would peer under the skirts of night at the thing that lurked there, and some one pressed the trigger of his gun, firing blindly into the jungle. For a moment each member of the little party braced himself against the impact of an enemy or shrank from the imaginary sting of the knife. And then the older soldiers—the veteran survivors of the fights by night—sensed the falseness of the alarm. Sergeant Clermont voiced his disgust.

"Who fired that shot?" he demanded. "One o' you brainless recruits, of course. I've a mind to break this gun across your nut!"

WITH the muzzle of the gun he was feeling his way along the ground, thrusting it forward at every cautious step. As he approached the spot where he had stumbled, the nose of his weapon came in contact with something soft. Clermont prodded it viciously, his finger taking up the slack in the trigger until the firing-piece was poised on a hair. But the object resisted passively without flinching.

"Strike a light, corporal. I've dropped that blankety-blank lantern!" Clermont exclaimed. "And don't any of you fool rookies begin to shoot. If it's a Moro, it's a dead one."

The match flared vividly and in its tiny circle a Moro sprawled on his back, an ugly blur where his face should have been. For a moment there was absolute silence. Clermont broke the spell.

"One," he said grimly. "He got one anyhow. I'll put flowers on his grave for that. . . . Ah!" he added, "here it is." With the pressure of a thumb, he spilt the soft electric glow upon the road. There was another silence, and then Clermont resumed the count.

"Two—three—four," he counted in tones that were half incredulous but were wholly filled with an intense satisfaction. "Four Moros!" he repeated. "Now what do you know about that? The old dub got four of 'em—hurray!"

Followed quick expressions of varying emotions in which men uttered blasphemies joyously in opining that Sarson must have had a mule or a thunderbolt for an ally. The party, returning jauntily to camp, met Slattery at the west door of the quarters—a long low nipa-thatched stockade. He greeted them in a low voice.

"How's Sarson?" Clermont demanded.

"Pretty bad, I guess. Doc Stader says he's a reg'lar picture-puzzle. The *medico's* in there sorting the pieces out now. Got here about an hour ago. But what luck did you have?"

"So-so. Found some dead ones," Clermont replied. "Busted wide open they were. That fellow Sarson must be some whirlwind in a scrap."

"What? Two? Did he hand it to two of 'em?"

"Naw! not two—four! Jes' four, Dick Slattery, and nary a bullet in any one of 'em. Take it from me, this Patrick Hell-roaring Sarson ought to have a medal—a gold medal and shoulder-straps. We went out to get the assassins and we find 'em littering the road. It was Sarson did the assassinating, and did it good and proper too, believe me! It's done my heart more good than anything since Yankee Dan trimmed that cagey old cutthroat Laem Tao. Yes, it's better'n that, for the Colonel played a Yankee game to win, but Sarson, he beat 'em at their own. He ought to get

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his ugly mug in the Hall o' Fame for this day's work. It was some triumphant doings, Dick—some massacre!"

It seemed far more likely, however, that Sarson would get what Slattery termed "merry ——." He had strolled off alone, in defiance of a special order that forbids soldiers in the Moro country to leave the immediate vicinity of the camp in parties of less than three, and his disobedience had angered Lieutenant Jordan, the company Commander. This anger flared into resentful resolution soon after reveille next morning, when the surgeon hurried into the *sanctum sanctorum* behind the bamboo partition at the far end of the quarters with a bundle of soiled rags in one hand and a cup of black coffee in the other. The surgeon, a little stout man named McCabe, tossed the rags on the table and took a sip from the smoking tin. Jordan regarded the rags with decided disfavor.

"What the —— are you bringing that muck in here for?" he demanded.

Picking up a long strip that was stained and stiff but showed white in splotches, McCabe took it over to the window where a wooden blind, hinged at the top, swung open to admit a little light.

"Look here," he said. "What do you make of that?"

Jordan glanced at the spot indicated; then studied it more attentively.

"Why, it's the imprint of a woman's hand—or a child's," he said after a moment's hesitation. "Where'd you get it?"

"Off Sarson," the little fat man retorted with a chuckle. "If it hadn't been for that piece of rag there wouldn't have been enough blood left in his carcass to feed a leech. . . . What do you make of it? See! fancy fabric skilfully applied and a granny-knot to top it off. No Sherlock needed, eh?"

Jordan made much of it in a profane but presumptive kind of way.

"Aren't we having enough trouble with these blankety-blank natives," he demanded angrily, "without running after their womenfolk? I'll court-martial that double-dashed fool as sure as I live."

"So you think so, too?" the surgeon chuckled. "Maybe so. Looks don't count for much in a land where main strength and ignorance win the daily bread. But it did seem too preposterous—Red Sarson a gay Lothario! Like finding tenderness and mercy in the heart of a savage Hun. Glad of it though. Been in this God-forsaken country for six mortal years now, and never saw a man with nerve enough to steal one o' their dinky little——"

"Nerve!" Jordan snorted. "It's idiocy, that's what it is—sheer idiocy! It would mean a holy war. Every petty sultan and dato within forty miles would forget his own private quarrels and—well, where would I be with twenty-eight men? I'll try him, curse his fool soul, as sure as I live!"

BUT the Lieutenant did not live. Before Red Sarson could sit up, a Moro, lying belly-down in the ditch that drains the road, had "got" Lieutenant Jordan as he paced by in the moonlight after supper. The new Commander, Lieutenant Harry Clinton, was disposed to wink at Sarson's escapade, yet was sorely puzzled too, for Division-Headquarters, having merely a formal knowledge of the dead, insisted on a full report.

"Suppose a party of them left camp together and Sarson got lost?"

Clinton glanced up quickly and met the surgeon's grin.

"But did they, Mac? Don't kid. This means a lot to that poor devil. He's getting tried for something I'd like to decorate him for."

"Well, it's up to them," the surgeon chortled. "That's for them to say."

And they said it. To the lieutenant's grim delight, Sarson produced two witnesses who would have sworn to an alibi in the face of wounds, dead men and the Ten Commandments. They were rookies, fresh from the States, and unduly proud of their Moro-killer. Clinton hid his satisfaction behind a lean brown hand.

"Sergeant Slattery," he said, "have the company clerk make out a report to that effect, and add that I respectfully commend Private Sarson's gallant fight to the attention of the department Commander."

Sarson was tickled by his taste of fame. It was new to him. He was elated, jubilant, and jibed his pet aversion, the company clerk, about not having to write like a perfect lady if one is a full-grown man with a coffee-cooling handshaker to do it for him. But when the clerk, forgetting prudence in the bitter reflection that this man had broken brutally into line for the corporalcy

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he coveted—when the clerk, stung to recklessness, retorted with profane and indelicate remarks about a red-headed Googoo-loving son of a this, that and the other, the Red One promptly forgot the joke.

Amid the wreckage of three bunks half a dozen men sat on Sarson while the storm calmed to a sheepish grin.

"What's eatin' you?" Sergeant Clermont growled. "Ain't you had enough o' battle, murder and suddint death? Be human for a change. You've a good chanct to make your stripes now if you jes' ten' t' bizness and leave that woman alone."

"I warn't after no woman," Sarson grunted.

"Then what possesses you to tear loose when Kratz calls you a Googoo-lover? You've heard worse without wishin' for to smear grease on the face o' nature."

"I warn't after no woman," Sarson repeated sullenly. "But if there was one," he added, "I wouldn't hear her misnamed."

And this denial was in line with his grudging accounts of the fight. They lacked details that the company hungered for. Who, for instance, had bandaged his wounds in this wild land that the Filipinos shun; where even Moro women, on the rare occasions of their venturing out, go heavily guarded lest a rival dato carry them off?

The surgeon swore that his life had been saved by those bandages of rich piña cloth —a cloth affected almost exclusively by the favorites of the harem. Yet the mystery of the cloth was as nothing to the mystery of the dainty finger-prints that soiled it—startling evidence that a delicate woman had adjusted the bandages in a land where only the lowest of slave-women come in contact with the alien, and they rarely. On this point Sarson stubbornly, even belligerently, maintained his ignorance, and to accuse him openly of running after a woman was to invite a fight. He had a boy's dread of anything bordering on the sentimental.

Yet Sarson nursed a vague and tender recollection in spite of all denials. It was the dream-picture of a pretty timid face and frightened eyes. He had never known a lovable woman, so this vision of womanliness succoring his own distress was very dear to him.

He remembered her as through a veil, radiant, angelic, her breath fluttering in his upturned face. Woman or angel, she had regarded him kindly, without shuddering away. She had given him a woman's sympathy at least; something for which he had groped blindly through the years. He was beginning to understand his needs, and with the understanding came a great fear.

Would she care for a beast like him even, if she proved to be real and he succeeded in finding her? Would she see the love and tenderness behind the freckles and the ugly lines, or would she be terrified by the monstrous strength that humped his shoulders and robbed strength of all its customary grace?

When he was on his feet, formidable and forbidding, would she approach him in the same spirit that she had shown when he was down and very near to dying? And if she did—what would it signify? Surely no woman could do more than pity him!

Thus Sarson reasoned it out, and with characteristic fearlessness forgot to take into account the physical obstacles that must inevitably come between him and any woman he might chance to find in the hills of Mindanao. There is no bar like that of religious prejudice, and the Moro hates the Christian with unflagging and furious fanaticism, even when policy leads him to hide his hatred behind smiles and the hypocritical *"mapia pagaari."*

BUT the "Big Red Fighting-Man"—so-called by the Moros when they laid aside their pride for the sake of profit and, squatting in the market-place, traded with the soldiers for Christian coin—the Big Red Fighting-Man clung to his ghostly sweetheart in spite of all.

The thought that any man would have the temerity to oppose him if she proved to be a flesh-and-blood woman, and a willing one, never entered his stubborn ruthless head. He wanted her. That was enough. And into this consuming purpose he turned all his turbulent energy. His bitter restlessness of spirit gave way to another and more delightful unrest.

Like the other, it led him far and wide. Lieutenant Clinton heard of these excursions, and guessed the cause.

"You are too good a man to lose," Clinton said one day. "No more of these wild-goose chases, mind! I thought there wasn't any woman anyhow."

"Well, sir, I ain't said there is," Sarson

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muttered sheepishly. For a moment he regarded Clinton with troubled half defiant eyes. Then, remembering that this man, in spite of his aloofness, had been his first friend, Red Sarson blurted out, "If there were, sir, she come after I was all in. But —but—but I'd like to thank her if there were."

Clinton fingered his lip.

"You're a —— fool, Sarson, but you're too good a man to lose. Forget it!"

"But sir, I ain't got but two more weeks of my enlistment to do. Even if I did get cut up, it wouldn't matter much. There ain't nobody goin' t' cry their eyes out over me."

"Confound it, cut it out, I say! I'm going to send you back whole, even if you are an unmitigated moonstruck ass."

"You mean you will try to stop me after I'm out?" Sarson asked incredulously. "After I'm a discharged man?"

"I mean I will stop you," Clinton snapped.

"No you won't," Sarson retorted indignantly. "Let me tell you that right now, lieutenant! There ain't enough men in this man's army to stop me. When I'm out, I'm out. I'm my own man then and I'll do as I please!"

Clinton glared at Sarson, but the latter did not flinch.

"Get out!" said Clinton sharply, and Sarson went, red head bristling defiantly.

Clinton followed the retiring soldier with a glance in which admiration mingled with amusement, and his hard mouth loosened in a sympathetic reminiscent shadow of a smile. Before Sarson's two weeks were up, however, Clinton was to lose all sympathy for him. Many things were destined to happen to the Red One during that brief "butt," and none of them, so to speak, was contracted in line of duty. Such wild happenings disturb the well-ordered life of a command, and arouse the resentment of superiors.

Sarson cared little as he strode down the squad-room aisle. Throwing himself on his bunk he waited an hour for the order to get his blanket and go to the guard-house. He waited in vain. No non-commissioned officer offered to place him under arrest. So he finally hitched on his belt, took down his gun and wandered off toward the dump. He chose high ground near the intersection of the Moro trail, rather than the dump itself, which swarmed with flies and foul odors, and laid down in a smother of grass.

HIS bitterness of heart was wrangling with bodily discomfort when the faint tinkling of bells fixed his attention. Almost immediately the bright red of a parasol bobbed into view through the grass on the farther slope. Red Sarson raised himself on straightened arms to peer across the hollow, but the parasol, streaking down the incline, dipped out of view in deeper grass. A sudden commotion followed this meteoric passage and checked the curse that Sarson was framing for the occasion. The grass tossed with the hurried passage of a pony. Frightened cries mingled with the frantic jingle of the harness-bells.

Something was wrong—decidedly so! It was a runaway. Perhaps it was Ahsoon—the dirty, throat-cutting ape of a Googoo! At any rate a Moro, and in trouble. That was enough to set Sarson chuckling with malevolent delight.

Sarson was regaling himself with the delightful vision of a fat old chieftain clinging to his high wooden box of a saddle, his great toes looped in the string stirrups and his knees gripping the pony's neck desperately. He was indulging himself in these unchristian imaginings when the bottom dropped out of heaven and an angel dropped into Red Sarson's earthy presence—all but hurled into his arms.

He had given no heed to the significant scattering of cries that followed the first commotion, and was arising to incite an ordinary runaway to greater and more frenzied effort, when there burst into the clearing a creamy wild flower of a girl perched on a rocking saddle and framed in the blood-red hollow of a parasol. It hung across her shoulder, clutched unconsciously in a helpless little hand. Under her labored a pony snorting terror from his bursting lungs, and a yard behind plunged a mad carabao. Bent on the grim business of death, the beast covered the yard in a long lumbering lunge that mixed pony, parasol and rider in a dusty tangle.

The pony, broken and dying, pitched forward a dozen feet and a wee pitiful shriek mingled with its death-scream. The shriek thrilled through Sarson as power stirs in a motor. He fired from the hip, even as the carabao charged the troubled heap, and

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sprang to meet the brute with clubbed gun. But the carabao swerved, swayed on its feet and went down, its heart torn open by a dum-dum bullet.

To their amazement and horror, the Moros found Red Sarson cuddling their mistress in his great hairy arms. They returned out of the grass, frightened and ashamed, but forgot their own dereliction in contemplating the unbelievable conduct of this Christian dog. Better death on the horns of the carabao than the pollution of this Red One's touch! What if this should reach the ears of the sultan? His favorite sister, the spoiled and pampered, the only woman in Pangao who could have her way, desecrated by the touch of this accursed Christian! And this Christian of all others! O Allah, mercy!

Sarson growled a response to their frantic importunities and glared at them askance, grudging the glance, for the girl had stirred with the quiver of returning life and his eyes were for her alone. What did he care for their laws, their sultan, their whining cries to Allah and the Prophet? This—and he laid his ear to a loosely swathed bosom that was beginning to flutter in a reassuring way—this was his little girl, his dream-girl!

One of the escort, bolder or more desperate than the others, thrust forward fiercely, his hand on the ever ready kris. But Sarson was equal to any degree of ferocity, and the Moros were afraid of injuring their mistress, even had they dared contend with the Big Red Fighting-Man. Backing toward the camp, Sarson menaced them with the butt of his gun, and not until they debouched into the clearing about the camp did the girl open her eyes—large dark eyes that grew larger and darker as conflicting emotions struggled for expression.

Sarson regarded her in mute appeal, adoration in his look. And finally she smiled, a wee plaintive smile; whereupon Sarson's heart turned a somersault, and did other strange and alarming things as the girl snuggled into his mothering arms. The Moros yelped and crowded at his heels unheeded. Red Sarson saw an end to the hungry hunt through the lonesome years.

But Sarson's foresight was defective. To his unbounded disappointment and anger the lieutenant, when he appeared on the scene, ordered the girl turned over to the Moros who were clamoring for her. And she expressed no preference, in spite of the smile she had bestowed on her ugly champion earlier in the day. In fact, she seemed relieved by the change, impelled perhaps by a natural spirit of coquetry and a native wit that took account of the unwisdom of appearing to favor a Christian too much.

That was a sore blow to a half regenerated Sarson. In the next two weeks he slipped rapidly back into his old state of truculent aloofness. And his irregularities kept pace with his mental processes. His dark ill humors surrounded him like a cloud and were blacker and more ominous than before the fight.

Hoping to save him from himself and the penalties of discipline disregarded or defied, Clinton spoke to him of the folly of his ways and incidentally mentioned the corporalcy that might be his within the next few days if he would conduct himself well enough to warrant the promotion. Sarson replied with bitter emphasis:

"Meaning no offense to you, sir, I don't want the stripes. I want my discharge, which is a-coming to me by rights in two days now. And I want a square deal, lieutenant. Jes' hands off an' lemme be. If it turns out bad, that's my funeral. And you ain't got no right to send me home if I want to stay back here as a civilian."

CLINTON dismissed him with an angry gesture and Sarson wandered forth once more to hunt where his heart could whisper its bitterness to the solitudes. His feet carried him aimlessly along until he brought up at the foot of a bluff from the top of which Camp Marahui overlooks both Lake Lanao and the distant sea. Here his eye lit upon something half hidden in the grass. It was a case of whisky cached by some avaricious teamster against the time when he could smuggle it past the guard and sell it to the soldiers at an exorbitant price.

And there Sarson was found a few hours later by a party of Moros who were jogging across country from the Holy Mount to their Pangao home. As it happened, this party was led by the Dato of Pangao himself, a man with old scores to settle: four dead, and a sister sullied by the Red One's abominable touch and worse aspirations.

Sarson, being both ignorant and careless of the future, had hesitated but a moment, then had drunk with the feverish abandon of the strong man who chafes under petty

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restrictions and wrestles with hopeless desires. When discovered by the Moros he was in a drunken stupor, stewing under a sun that would have killed most men. It was to this same stupor that Sarson owed his hours of grace, for a Moro would have killed him where he lay had not the leader of the party uttered a quick rebuke as the barong hung in air on the turning of a stroke that would have snipped off the head of the sleeper.

"My son!" he said. "My son!" An evil smile indicated the malice that was in his mind. "Hold thy hand. The man is without sense. Hast forgotten that the minds of such are carried in the pocket of Mahomet? The Prophet has delivered him into our hands, praise Allah! and *this thing* shall surely feel the edge of the sword; but we must wait—wait until *It* is a man again. So is it written. Bind him tightly with your best bahooka (for he has the strength of seven devils!) and the pony shall carry him in. To-morrow he will learn that it is very foolish to pit unbelieving strength against the Faithful."

Thus Sarson came to find himself trussed to an upright in the shadow of Pangao's establishment. The Moros had tied him cunningly and gone off to sleep, relying on the Red One's stupor and the toughness of the bonds to keep him there. In this they underestimated the man's recuperative powers.

It was past midnight when Sarson stirred with a first flicker of returning consciousness. Painfully, stupidly he struggled out of the mental fog and into that terrible depression that follows the debauch. The night air of the mountains nipped to the bone, and his conscience cut deeper. Hope—the hope to save his own skin and smash his enemies—was slipping from him for the first time in his life, when something stirred at his feet, a dark thing that seemed to crouch. Sarson kicked out, viciously, frantically, forgetful of the bonds that bound him, and his leg, surging forward with the convulsive impetus of quick fear, burst the thongs and swung free. There followed a frightened squeal and the cause of his alarm resolved itself into nothing more terrifying than a wild pig that scuttered off into the grass.

For a long time Sarson leaned limply against his hitching-post. They had bound him to one of four uprights—heavy timbers freshly planted as a foundation for a new shack—and he knew that they had not taken this trouble for nothing. As the full truth of the situation came home to him Sarson tried the thongs that bound his hands to the post behind him. He strained at them until they cut, but, unlike the raw bahooka, these bonds of seasoned hemp were more than equal to his tremendous strength; or rather, his arms were tied so cunningly that he was unable to bring his full strength into play.

He had labored for an hour, the bonds biting at raw flesh, when it occurred to him that he might get better leverage by working the cords down the post so as to pull crouching, with all the power of his body in the heave.

Slowly and with infinite patience he worked the loops lower and lower until his hands were on a level with his knees; then strained upward, his teeth gritting audibly and the sweat of agony and labor starting from his pores. Something gave an inch, and Sarson cursed the cords for slipping. Again he worked them into place, and again straightened with a great grunting heave. This time there was the same response, but Sarson forgot his pain and could have capered for sheer joy. The hempen ropes had not slipped up at all. It was the post—the post was being lifted!

Sarson learned this as he leaned against it for a breathing-spell. It swayed ever so slightly before his weight.

WITH desperate energy Sarson coaxed and tore the heavy timber from its place and, balancing it along his back, started for camp looking like some monstrous survivor of prehistoric times. The sentry saw him by the light of a late moon as he tottered out of the grass and lurched across the drain-ditch into the road; saw him and fired forthwith, waiving the customary formalities. Something between a curse and a bellow of rage trailed on the tail of the report and the target sprawled forward as men tumbled out of their bunks, guns in hand.

They found Sarson pinned beneath his cross, helpless and half dead, his arms twisted into grotesquely impossible positions, but the man himself still undaunted and full of fight. From the corner of a mouth clogged with dirt he cursed everything that crawled, walked or flew, with particular

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reference to blind-eyed recruits and their immediate ancestry.

As he pointed out, with more power than politeness, it was not the recruit's fault that he wasn't dead. In stiffening his back against the load he carried he had straightened up too much and the tail of his burden, coming in sharp contact with the ground, had thrown him off his balance at about the same time the sentry fired.

If Sarson was eloquent, the first sergeant was more so.

"W'at kind o' stunt is this?" he demanded in the course of his tirade. "A new one —sending men home with a whole skin and a broken back!"

Sarson gasped an explanation as the surgeon dressed his hurts. These included a dislocated shoulder and hands that caused the surgeon to shake his head and take a look at his surgical kit.

Clinton, too, found his tongue and used it. Rolling over in his bunk he cursed Sarson for an ingrate and an ignoramus.

"No!" he said. "We won't endanger the lives of good men for a fool like that just because he sees fit to run his fat head into trouble! *Sleeping out*, eh; not content with *going out* alone? Perhaps we'll go over in the morning and *hablar* this man Pangao, but not to-night."

In the morning, however, they found empty houses, from which the former occupants had departed hurriedly. Apparently this flight had been occasioned by Sarson's escape. Whether it followed a dread of the Red One's individual vengeance, or merely indicated a desire to dodge embarrassing questions backed up by magazine-guns may never be known.

An entire tribe moved that morning, nor left behind a single straggler to give a reason why. Certain it is that the tribesmen of Pangao entertained a wholesome respect for the miracle-worker who could tear a house-prop from its placement and walk away with it, to say nothing of that other unbelievable incident when a clubbed gun in his hands had triumphed over the deadly weapons of trained fighting-men.

That the Moros had begun to regard Sarson with a sort of superstitious fear was manifested later. Their opportunity to learn more of his indomitable spirit was partially explained when Clinton and his party returned hungry and disgusted from an uneventful skirmish through jungle-grass and tangled forest. Sarson had disappeared again. The surgeon announced the fact from the doorway.

"Did that blockhead run off with you?" he asked.

"What blockhead? What do you mean?" Clinton demanded.

"Why Sarson, of course. Who else would leave his bed and amble off with two hands hanging to him that ought to be cut off and buried?"

"Is he gone?" Clinton snorted. "To —— with him then! I'm through with him. He can take what's coming to him now."

Six days later, however, Clinton was searching his mind for an adequate, yet truthful, explanation that would give an appearance of lawful authority to Sarson's escapades. Technically the man was a deserter, for he had absented himself from his command before receiving his formal discharge. But Clinton knew that Sarson was not the deserting kind. He had taken what he conscientiously considered his due on the day that his term of enlistment actually expired. And it is hard to classify as a deserter a man whom one likes and feels is dead. In the midst of these cogitations, Slattery hurried into the office much excited.

"They're coming, sir!" he exclaimed.

"Who? What the —— are you talking about?" Clinton demanded impatiently. "What's getting into you people lately? You seem to think I'm a mind-reader."

"Beg pardon, sir. Sergeant Clermont just came in to tell me. He picked 'em up with the field-glasses a moment ago and he's sure it's them. They——"

"They, who?" Clinton snapped. "What'n hell is this all about?"

"Sarson," Slattery replied. "Sarson, sir —and that woman."

It was true. Clinton and half a dozen men met the two as they toiled painfully toward camp. Sarson moved weakly, like a man who is very sick. His eyes stared stupidly at nothing, and his mind, wandering through vague distances, took no account of his stumbling feet. As the welcoming party hurried to his assistance, Sarson lurched forward and would have fallen had not the girl, with a false strength that fed upon her nerves, slipped an arm about her abductor to steady him. In doing so she dropped something that clattered as it fell. It was Sarson's gun.

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NOW, if any one thinks that Sarson was a tyrant in his home, that some one ought to get married and complete his education. When I stopped at his hemp-farm on my way to Manila, Mrs. Sarson had her bear of a husband under the tiniest little thumb—and he seemed to like it! It was the first time that I had seen him thoroughly contented. His turbulent nature seemed to revel in the pretty tyranny of the one he loved. She was his idol—a dainty pagan idol of ivory and jade wrapped in loose folds of scarlet piña that matched the color of her lips.

"Happy? Oh, yis, he iss happy," she admitted naively. "But," shaking a wealth of black hair at her grinning husband, "he iss the baddes' man. He iss more Mahometan zin Chlistian. I foun' him to-day, 'iss ver' morning, stan'ing on his knees an' fiding our liddler boy lak—lak fun; teaching him to leeck the liddler Filipinos."

Sarson and I both roared with laughter, and the little Moro lady looked puzzled, between tears and the contagion of our mood. Outside, my merriment received a sudden setback. Patrick Sarson, the second, a red-headed imp with his mother's eyes, was astride my mare, the bare chubbiness of absurdly short legs thrust rakishly to either side. He was playing "General," and his army, a group of Filipino children, stood at a safe distance and regarded him with awe. I was for rescuing him quickly, for the mare is rather skittish, but Sarson staggered me with a slap on the back.

"Ain't he the little son of a gun?" he whispered.

RED MUSGRAVE'S LUCK

A Story of the North Woods

by Frank Houghton

CHAPTER I

A MAN OF THE NORTH WOODS

CHARLES MUSGRAVE, known to every one throughout the north as "Red" Musgrave, was by blood a Scotchman. He was born at Old Fort Confidence, at the head of Dease Bay on Great Bear Lake, some twenty-five or thirty miles within the Arctic Circle. His mother had died at his birth, and sixteen years afterward his father had followed her into that mysterious Beyond.

Red Musgrave had lived all his life in the Far North, in the territory of Mackenzie. At the opening of this story he had reached the age of twenty-five. He was a great, rugged man, very spare of

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flesh, with fine shoulders and a back as flat as a board. He had a strong, lean face, freckled and beaten red by stress of that wild Northern weather. It was a brave face too, and as honest and merry as a healthy joke. The eyes that lighted it were blue as heaven. His hair was thick, with almost a curl in it, and it was red, as is the invariable accompaniment to such a complexion.

In height Red Musgrave stood six feet two inches in his moccasins, and he could outrun, and throw in a wrestle, any man that he had ever met in the wide North. His one gentle accomplishment was dancing, and the step he loved above all others was the Highland Fling. He had learned the dance from his father, who, worthy man in that respect, looked upon a "Hielander" incapable of footing that lively measure as a crying disgrace. Red Musgrave danced it too, with such a gay aplomb as to bring the tears of happiness and pride to Marie Bouchet's pretty eyes.

It is just possible, for he danced it for her very often, that he stormed her heart to its surrender with those light, dancing feet of his as much as with his honest Highland eyes and voice. He was reckoned, too, to be one of the best hunters, trailers and trappers in the country, while as a rifle-shot it would have puzzled any one to name a better.

Now, apart from Musgrave's proficiency with a rifle and knowledge of the habits of the animals and birds in that wide country, and bush-lore generally, which is an education of sorts, he had only a rudimentary knowledge of reading and writing. But nevertheless Red Musgrave was ambitious, with a sane, healthy, human ambition. He would establish himself as a free-trader and marry Marie Bouchet.

MARIE BOUCHET was a pretty, bright-eyed French girl, who lived with her father and mother on the shores of Great Slave Lake, about ten miles northwest of the Hudson Bay Post at the mouth of Hay River. Her father, old Joe Bouchet, lived as so many do in this interesting world, namely, anyhow. Or, as Madame would remark in speaking of her husband to the holy father on his annual visit—by the way, Madame adored her Joe—"It is just 'come day, go day, God send Sunday,' with Joe."

Madame would roll her still handsome black eyes upward as she said it, and sigh with unction. Madame had been a pretty, happy, cheerful girl of nineteen when she had taken Joe for better or worse at Athabasca Landing, twenty-five years before. In a sense they had been hard years, arduous years of struggle and some hardship, as the life of the helpmate of a Northern fisherman and hunter must be. And the story of her love, and toil, and patience in great little things, Time had written in the lines upon her brow, while smiles and laughter—for Madame was cheerful and happy still—were penciled in a fine scroll about her eyes. For she was a woman of middle age now, and her hair was gray, and she was very stout. But she had always kept her Joe's little home pleasant through those arduous years, and she had kept his big boy's honest heart, too, and to-day she dearly loved a gossip with a Breed or Indian woman and a pipe of trade-tobacco.

At the time of the opening of this story everything was looking very bright indeed to Red Musgrave, for that Winter, owing to one extraordinarily lucky catch, his take of furs had been most valuable. His unusual luck consisted in the trapping of a silver fox, about the beginning of February, too, when furs are reckoned at their best. And this was an exceptionally fine skin. He had never seen one larger or more perfect. It would easily fetch at least one thousand dollars in trade at the Post, or in cash at Edmonton.

By which great piece of luck he would be able to build and stock his trading-post in the Summer. And in the Summer, too, when the holy father made his annual visit, he would marry pretty Marie Bouchet. If it had not been for this great stroke of luck he would have had to work and save for several more long years. On his last visit to Marie's home, at Christmas-time, she had assured him that she had been praying all that Winter, night and morning, to the blessed saints that he might have fortune in his trapping and hunting.

A day or two after catching the fox an Indian whom Musgrave knew, Adickawse (Little Caribou) by name, happened along on his way to the Hay River post. To him he entrusted a letter to Marie, telling her how the saints had answered her prayers, and of his wonderful good fortune. He told her, too, that he would try to make a

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flying visit to her home to see her about the beginning of March.

As he strode along that morning he felt that the time had nearly come when he must go, if he would keep that half-promise of his.

That night he camped on Weasel Lake, where he had some nooses set, with a spring-pole for lynx. On the outlet of the lake, too, there was a fine beaver-dam, in which he had a couple of traps.

That morning Musgrave was in luck, for in each of the two traps he found a beaver. Thus far on his round he had caught, besides the beaver, three marten and two mink. There were but three more traps to visit ere reaching Mouse Creek, with one at the creek and one again at Hay River crossing. From the crossing to his head camp on Dead Rabbit Lake, a distance of eight miles, there remained but ten traps to be looked at.

At the first of the three, before reaching Mouse Creek, he found a white weasel. It was not much, he laughed as he put it in his pocket, but it would pay for two handkerchiefs for pretty Marie. The bait, a hare's head, was intact. The unfortunate weasel had not even had the satisfaction of a meal. Musgrave reset the trap and hurried on.

For the past few miles he had been walking through open woods of fair-sized spruce-trees. It had snowed two nights before, and in the fresh fall were many tracks of marten, while, of course, everywhere were the little runways of the hares.

When within but a short distance of his next trap he saw, on the white surface of the snow, a larger trail running to an intersection with his own. The animal that had made it had, upon reaching his, turned and journeyed with it and but a few feet away.

When Red Musgrave reached those strange footprints he came to a quick halt. Then he dropped his Winchester-butt on the beaten snow beside his shoes, twisted his short mustache and swore softly to himself. For the trail was one that no trapper ever desires to see in his neighborhood.

For quite five minutes Red Musgrave studied it. It was not the trail of a very large animal. It was a little like the trail a yearling bear might make, but with narrower footprints. It was the trail of the most cunning animal that roams the Canadian wilds. He roams them, too, in a pelt that is worth but little trade. His cunning and suspicion are so great that no way of trapping him has yet been devised with even fair chances of success. His sense of smell, too, is so nice that he will detect poisoned meat easily, no matter how carefully prepared. He is the trapper's scourge and greatest enemy. The carcajou or wolverine!

HE IS a lazy brute, too, preferring that others hunt for him. His methods are extraordinarily simple. He is a great wanderer in his habitat and he is invariably abroad after nightfall, though occasionally seen by day. In his nocturnal peregrinations, when he has the good fortune to discover a line of traps, like Musgrave's, his meals are found for him. He merely follows the unfortunate trapper and helps himself to the bait or to the valuable fur-bearing animal that may be caught.

If the trapper has the good fortune to see the thief, he may shoot him. But the chances are not one in a thousand that he will either trap or poison him. He is much more likely, ere long, to be compelled to take himself and his traps to another part of the wilderness. And he may count himself fortunate indeed if the cunning brute does not accompany him.

That Winter was the third one of Musgrave's trapping on Hay River, and for two reasons he would have been extremely sorry to be compelled to leave. In the first place, it was an excellent country for fur, and in the second place it was within an easy day - and - a - half journey of Marie Bouchet.

Until that day he had never seen a sign of the hated wolverine, though of course the possible arrival of one was only to be reckoned upon as one of the many chances for good or ill in what Eskimos call "the luck of hunters."

However, there was nothing to be gained by standing still, staring at the trail and anathematizing his bad luck. Not that Musgrave was much given to swearing at misfortune or at anything at all. He was much more likely to smile at reverses than to rail at them. Like so many dwellers in the wilderness, he had evolved out of the solitude of that primitive life of his a philosophy sufficient for his needs; a serene acceptation of conditions, one that seldom

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failed him and upon which he could always draw.

Red Musgrave shouldered his rifle and continued on his way while beside him was the trail of the cunning carcajou. Shortly after his coming on that ominous trail he reached his next trap, and was not in the least surprised at what he saw. The trap had been baited with a piece of porcupine, and in it he had caught a fisher, but all that now remained was about two or three inches of tail, with a very little of the hide and some blood-stains on the snow. This time he did not reset the trap, but took it with him. From the next three the baits were taken and the traps unsprung. He also lifted them.

By that time he had reached Hay River. From the hollow root of a tall dead tree standing on the bank he took a blackened pail which he filled with snow, pressing as much into the pail as it would hold. He then laid wood for a fire, using some resinous kindling which he had cached with the pail in the hollow tree.

The fire blazed fiercely on the application of a single match, the kindling catching as though it had been soaked in coal-oil. In a minute or two the snow in the kettle was melting and more had to be added. It was easier to make tea from melted snow than to chop through several feet of ice for water.

That day Musgrave did not stay for the smoke usual after a meal, but, filling and lighting his pipe, he hurried on.

At the river-crossing, where his trail to the post left the one he had been following from his traps, he came upon a second fresh trail. This time, however, it was the trail of a team of two dogs and a man on snow-shoes. From its appearance they had been traveling both light and fast. Musgrave was satisfied, too, that it had not been made longer ago than the previous evening. Whoever he was, he was traveling down the river.

There now remained only some eight miles to travel and a dozen traps to see before Musgrave reached his head camp on Dead Rabbit Lake, and from three of them the carcajou had taken heavy toll, namely, two marten and a second fisher. In one place beside the root of a fallen spruce he found where his unwelcome visitor had caught and eaten a hare. Certainly, thus far, what the carcajou's meals had lacked in quantity they had more than made up for in quality, for that first visit of his must have cost Musgrave quite thirty dollars' worth of valuable fur.

CHAPTER II

A SILVER-FOX PELT

WHEN Musgrave reached his journey's end that evening he was not in the very best of humors. All the way, too, from the river was the trail of the stranger and his two dogs. But the thought of the stranger during his absence visiting the shack where was his whole Winter's catch of valuable furs, did not cause him a moment's uneasiness. The Indians throughout the country were all honest, and, excepting a white trader, who was also honest, there were no white men.

When Musgrave entered his shack that afternoon a slight disarray in it at once attracted his attention. A heap of furs lay in confusion on the floor. Musgrave had always kept them in assorted bunches hanging from a beam. For a moment he stared. He could hardly believe his eyes. Then he realized it all. That stranger, whoever he might be, white man or red, had been through his pack of precious furs! A moment later and Musgrave was going over them with frantic hands.

He went through them a second time, slowly, carefully. He knelt on the floor of his little cabin with his season's catch scattered before him. He counted them a third time, and his count was short ten marten-skins. But that was not the worst. There came upon his face a strained look, while into his eyes there crept an expression that will sometimes come into the eyes of one who has received a wound that threatens the framework of his life.

Musgrave put his hand up to his mustache. He was thinking, calculating, planning. Had the blow affected his happiness and life alone he might have laughed, for he was ripe just then for killing. But Marie's happiness, too, suffered from that blow, and she, poor girl, had prayed all that Winter to the saints for his prosperity. Could her prayers all have been wasted? Marie was so *dévote!* And at the moment his mind was filled with thoughts of that girl who waited for him—trusting in the saints.

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For that stranger, that miserable thief, with his team of two dogs and his start of forty miles or so, had taken with him the silver-fox skin. Musgrave's capital. The wherewithal to start his business in the coming Summer, to build his home and Marie's home. He realized, just then, how he had looked forward to the coming Summer. Hopes are happy children of the mind, and now a thief had stolen those hopes of his and his mind was desolate.

LARGE natures take blows quietly, if hardly; depth is not easily stirred. Musgrave was very quiet. It seemed as though a calm had settled on him, a veritable serenity and peace of rage and hate. He did not even swear. To him, just then, railing and oaths would have seemed most trivial. He only wanted quiet and the big open beneath the sky, the freedom of the woods, in which to think and breathe. Rising to his feet he walked slowly out-of-doors.

It was then only about four o'clock in the afternoon, but at that time, in those latitudes, at that season of the year, only a pale twilight lingered above the horizon. Directly overhead the stars, a million tiny points of light, pricked the blue. The Northern Lights splashed the wide heaven with a wavering, shimmering splendor, a brilliancy that paled the stars, lighting a frozen world. The bush on every hand looked ebon black as compared with the white snow and that lingering radiance in the west. There was that breathless hush of utter stillness everywhere, which is the soul of forests when the winds are sleeping.

Musgrave walked up and down before his little cabin. His moccasins crunched the snow harshly, for it was bitter cold. With a sudden running sound the ice cracked on the river. To the westward, from the dim aisles of trees, a long quavering, complaining cry, indescribably forlorn, seemed to grow out of the silence. It deepened and swelled in volume; it, too, seemed moving swiftly. It died out lingeringly, sadly, eerily, and that brooding silence settled down again. The wolves were hunting!

Of a sudden Musgrave seemed to waken from that lethargy of hate and rage and realize that the effort to recover his stolen property could not be made too quickly, that every moment wasted in futile anger was an advantage gained by the thief. He realized, too, the difficulties that lay before him. If the thief was only ordinarily intelligent and cunning, with thousands of square miles of trackless wilderness in which he might hide, what chances were Musgrave's? But his chances, though poor enough, were not quite so poor as that might lead one to suppose. For after all there were only a limited number of Hudson Bay Posts at which to sell the skin, unless he carried it to Edmonton. In this case it would be lost indeed.

Of course his only chance was to catch the thief before he parted with the treasure. In one way the scanty population was an advantage, for a man traveling with but two dogs in his team was bound to be remarked at every trading-post and camp he passed. Then, too, the selling of such a silver-fox skin would be noised over the length and breadth of the country, which might make him hold it for a time—at least till Spring.

There was one other thing, however, that Musgrave realized, and the realization fairly staggered him. Were he confronted with the man who stole his fox-skin, and the skin in his possession, he could not swear to it! And yet another thought perplexed him, that, apart from the thief's having but two dogs, there was no clue to him whatever.

From that lethargic calm on the discovery of his loss, Musgrave became of a sudden all virile energy. He was thoroughly aroused at last. If he was ever to get his precious silver-fox skin back again he must get it back himself. He must match his cleverness and cunning against those of the thief. But first of all he must find something to go by, a clue of some kind. As a trailer, Musgrave excelled. Perhaps that art might now stand him in good stead.

THE first thing to be done, however, was to cook himself a meal. A man never worked the better for being hungry. In a few minutes a fire was burning in his little stove and some slices of bacon frying. Water was heating in the kettle, too. Fortunately there was enough bread cooked to last for several days. His meal finished, he began at once to examine the interior of his shack for evidences of the thief.

While eating he had noticed that a block of wood he often used for a stool was now

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lying on its side near the middle of the rough-hewn floor. He noticed, too, that the block lay upon a two-inch plank. As he ate his bread and bacon he would every now and then glance at the block. He was used to his little shack and a certain careless method he had of placing every article in an accustomed place, not from a habit of overtidiness, but rather from that frequent form of laziness which finds it easier to replace anything than the slight mental effort necessary in selecting a new arrangement.

It is possible, too, that he glanced at the block of wood without being actually aware that he did so, for he was thinking of Marie just then. In fact, ever since his loss had become known to him, the thought of Marie and her grief at that loss had jostled each other for first place in his mind.

His meal finished he lit two candles, the better to see during his search. First of all he would investigate the meaning of the block and plank. He crossed the floor, and his change of position at once revealed it. Directly over the block a little jar containing a beaver-castor had hung all Winter. The jar was gone! Musgrave at once concluded that the block had been placed to stand upon. He could reach it easily, in his moccasins, standing on the floor. Evidently the block alone did not raise the thief sufficiently, hence the plank. The block was a good six inches in thickness, while the plank was two. The thief was short in stature, that was plainly evident.

Next the appearance of the bed attracted his attention. It was a raised bed with a framework of logs, designed and built by Musgrave in his few leisure moments, a bed of sufficient height to form a comfortable seat. Musgrave had left it smoothly made. Now it was slightly tossed about the foot, with the impress of weight, as though some one had sat upon it.

Like the thickly populated haunts of man, the wilds, too, have their conventions, their unwritten social codes that those brought up in the broad wilderness will not infringe upon. No Indian would ever be guilty of such a solecism as to visit a man's shack during his absence and sit upon his blankets. Musgrave at once felt sure that the thief was a white man, and a very ignorant one. He had felt sure of it from the beginning, as Indians far from the abodes of whites are seldom thieves.

Before touching the bed at all, Musgrave brought a candle and examined it. Something caught his eye. He picked it up. It was a gray hair.

On the floor at the foot of the bed he found an old discarded moccasin-string, knotted where it had been broken. He examined it carefully by the light of the two candles. Of one thing he felt satisfied in a moment: that it was of no kind of deerskin that he had ever seen. He decided also that it was not of dogskin. It was too strong, and of a different quality. In appearance it was like gut used in the lacing of snow-shoes, but soft in texture and supple as the best tanned caribou-skin.

While Musgrave looked at it he remembered having hung two pair of deerskin strings upon a nail on the opposite wall. On finishing his examination of the string he put it in his pocket and looked for those he had left hanging on the nail. He was not surprised to find that they, too, had been appropriated. He next made a very careful examination of the whole interior of the shack, carrying the two candles with him, but found no further evidence of the thief.

Musgrave's next move was to look outside, about the door, for some further trace that might help him; but, excepting a few black hairs where the team had been lying down, he discovered nothing. Before returning to the shack, however, he followed the trail a little back to see a clear impression of the thief's snow-shoes. This time he did discover something, and was astonished that he had not noticed it before. The shoes worn by the thief, where they reached their greatest breadth, that is, beneath the toe, were broader than those worn in that part of the North. They tapered, too, more quickly, while forward from the wooden bar in front of the toe they were much shorter. But the most striking difference of all was that their impression on the snow vanished from the cross-bar before the toe, which clearly showed them to be turned up in front. Musgrave, for the first time in his life, was looking at the factory-made imitation of the snow-shoe, worn in the East and South.

After his examination of the trail, Musgrave returned to the shack to prepare for his tramp of thirty-six miles to the Post. He had already walked some twenty-odd

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miles that day. But rest now he knew was an impossibility if he would catch the thief. Besides, he was not tired! Once he had said to Marie, after a long walk, "A man who can't cover his fifty miles in a day, when put to it, is no man at all."

Now was his opportunity to make good that boast.

He packed his blankets, with provisions for several days inside an oblong piece of canvas, Indian-fashion, with a "tump-line." This time he also took all his furs with him. In front of his shack he packed everything upon a little sleigh. Then he looked at his watch, to find that it wanted but a few minutes of five o'clock.

That evening, when he left his shack, he fastened the front door with a padlock, as his time of absence would be indefinite. The key he hid in a secret place beneath the eaves. Taking the line of his sled in his hand, and with his rifle, a .303 Winchester, slung across his back, he started on his long tramp. He carried a sheath-knife and a light ax in his belt, and in one hand a green stick some thirty inches in length, fairly stout, with which to knock away the snow which continually cakes between the ball of the foot and the netting of the snow-shoe. That night he told himself, with grim lips, barring accidents, he was likely to test his strength and endurance to the utmost. For he was determined to see, ere sleeping, the Hay River Post, and possibly Marie Bouchet's home.

CHAPTER III

THE TEEPEE IN THE PINES

AS MUSGRAVE left his shack that evening it occurred to him that his going away was the only method of ridding himself of the carcajou. For when that lazy animal found that his food was no longer provided for him he would probably take his departure.

On snow-shoes a man takes a longer stride and covers the ground more quickly than without them, so that Musgrave made the first stage of his journey, to the river-crossing, in a little under two hours. By five o'clock the next morning he reckoned that he should reach the post. That was allowing himself one hour for food and rest, and eleven hours for walking.

The night, though fine, was wonderfully still and cold. The sky was cloudless. Musgrave walked with a great swinging stride from the hip, one that devoured the miles. For seven long hours he kept up that steady, driving pace.

While he walked he thought of the thief, and his rage was a spur that goaded him. He told himself that if he did not kill him in recovering his fox-skin he would certainly thrash him to within an inch of his life. The thought that he himself might get killed, or that he might never come up with him at all, did not just then occur to him. Wherever the thief went, he must leave the trail of those queer snow-shoes.

Then, too, the chances were that he had not over twelve hours, start—probably not twelve hours. It would be queer indeed if he could not out-travel him. He laughed. The fine exercise of walking in that cold, fresh air raised his hopes high.

At one point on the river there was the fresh trail, where some caribou had crossed the ice since the thief had journeyed down it. One of the deer had jumped the snow-shoe tracks, clearing them by a good twelve feet. Another had followed the tracks quite fifty yards, then, leaving them, had struck off to join his companions in their march, single file, between the trees.

Once again that night, from the black forest on his left, Musgrave heard wolves howl.

A little farther on, the river made a sudden bend which the trail crossed by the land. Here the thief had stopped for a meal and had made a fire. In the trampled snow about the fire Musgrave found another clue—two ends of cigarettes. He recognized what they were at once, for twice he had seen men smoke such things, once at the Hay River Post, and once, three years previously, at Fort Chippewyan. But those other men had used white paper, while brown had been used in these.

It was then about eleven o'clock, and for another hour Musgrave kept on. When at length he did stop to eat he only allowed himself half an hour; then on again at the same fast walk.

At the end of another five miles or so, on rounding a point, the silence was broken by the barking of dogs. From a glow of firelight among some second-growth jack-pine Musgrave could locate an encampment but a few yards back from the river-bank. It was but a single teepee, with a

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good fire burning inside, judging from the shower of sparks issuing from the opening in the roof. The sleigh-dogs bayed him savagely.

Then, lower down, he saw the glow of a second light, as some one pulled the teepee-door open to thrust a head out. Musgrave promptly asked, in the Yellowknife dialect, if there was anybody there. An Indian answered him.

A moment later he stood at the door while it was being opened from the inside. There was only one occupant of the tepee, an Indian by the name of Negic (the Otter), whom Musgrave knew well.

IT WAS evident that the Indian was just beginning a meal, though it was but a little after two o'clock in the morning. When Musgrave asked him why he was up so early, he grinned, and shrugging his shoulders said that he was hunting caribou. He had evidently had some success, too, for as he spoke he took a frying-pan with some steak, just cooked, from the fire. He glanced up at Musgrave and caught his eye.

"Eat," he said.

As he spoke he divided the steak in the pan with his knife and, putting half of it on a tin plate, he handed it to Musgrave. Next from the head of his blankets he took a small loaf of baking-powder bread, half of which he also gave to his guest. He had now shared his food equally and began gravely to eat his own.

Very naturally Musgrave was most anxious to question the Indian, but it would not have been bush etiquette to have plunged into the subject at once, besides which, in all probability, Musgrave would have learned nothing. When dealing with Indians one must deal calmly, decorously. Haste upsets them. The meal was eaten slowly and in almost a complete silence. When they were both finished and had filled and lighted their pipes, Musgrave began talking.

First of all he asked Negic how long he had been camping there.

"Two days," was the reply.

"Yesterday a white man, with two dogs in his team, passed down the river. Is it not so, Negic?"

"It is even as you say, friend."

"He was a small man and his hair was gray. I am thinking that perhaps he did come to your teepee. Is it not so?"

To his surprise the Indian shook his head. Musgrave had counted on getting valuable information when he saw the teepee.

After all, the white man was more cunning than he had supposed.

"Did you see him on the river?"

"Truly, friend."

"Did you speak with him?"

Again the Indian shook his head, then he said,

"In the middle of the day, after I had eaten, my dogs did make a great noise, shouting that they did see some man or deer. I lay upon my blankets as I now lie upon them and smoked my tobacco while I thought, with pain, how Walking Rabbit had taken much tobacco from me when last we did play at 'chuck-stones.' For he was very cunning and his talk was smooth, like a deep stream. And I will gladly tell you the story of Walking Rabbit and Wahaneetah. How Walking Rabbit did beat Wahaneetah, and how Walking Rabbit was drowned at the head of Man-without-a-Paddle Rapids. I am thinking that it is a story that will please you greatly."

"I do not doubt it, Negic," replied Musgrave, "but now I can not listen to it, for I would get to the store before the little old white man leaves it, as I wish greatly to talk with him."

"He did not walk as a very old man walks," said the Indian, "but rather like one who is in haste. He did bend greatly at his knees and at his waist, too, like one who is tired."

Then Musgrave asked the Indian when he would be going to the Post.

"I go to-day when I have smoked another pipe," was the reply.

"I was thinking that if your load is not too heavy that I might put my pack upon it?" said Musgrave.

Negic at once assured him of the pleasure it always gave him to carry a friend's blankets. Musgrave then told him of the value of his pack and that he wanted him to leave it in care of the Company's man, which Negic agreed to do.

A minute or two later Musgrave was striding down the river faster than ever, for walking without the sled was almost equal to a rest, it was such a relief.

Only ten miles farther to the Post! He felt that he was almost there, it seemed so near. He had walked now about forty-six

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miles, without sleeping, since yesterday morning. Yet he was not tired, he told himself.

A little farther on he saw three wolves standing on the ice in the middle of the river. At sight of the man they trotted to the further bank and, sitting together like dogs, watched him pass.

WHEN Musgrave got to within a couple of miles of the Post the trail of the thief and his two dogs left the river and struck through the bush on the west bank. His reasons for doing so were obvious. It was very plain that he intended, as much as possible, to avoid all chances of meeting people. Sooner or later, though, he must visit a free-trader or a Company-post to procure the bare necessaries of existence, unless he killed game, and his chances of game along that traveled Northern trail were not great.

Then, too, so long as he wore those turned-up shoes, his trail was as easily followed as a wagon-road. If he left the trail to hunt, and no snow-storm hid his place of leaving, Musgrave told himself he had him; while if he took the trail to the north he was almost certain to meet some one ere many days. Musgrave, too, was bound to meet all travelers from the north by the same trail.

Musgrave had left Hay River now, and was following the thief's trail through the woods. About two miles from the river he came on the thief's first camp, about thirty-five miles from his shack on Dead Rabbit Lake. The thief had made himself a very comfortable resting-place, cutting a good supply of balsam-brush for his bed. Musgrave could see, too, from the hollow thawed at the foot of the brush, and the green block supports—even without the remaining short sticks of fire-wood—that he used a camp-stove. His tent, too, was a fair-sized one for one man. In short, his manner of camping savored more of a surveyor than a bushman. In the hollow thawed by the stove Musgrave found half a dozen more ends of cigarettes.

He only delayed a few minutes at the camp, then hurried on, and in another mile or so he struck the trail between the Post and Bouchet's house. The thief had crossed the trail and gone on in the direction of the lake. Musgrave now judged himself to be about six or, at the outside, seven miles from Marie's home. The thought of her nearness thrilled and refreshed him. In another hour and three-quarters he would see her again, he would hold her in his arms and kiss her sweet lips! The delicious hope lightened his blue eyes and gave a renewed buoyancy to his step.

Thus far Musgrave's quick pace had never slackened. If anything, on the contrary, he was walking faster than when he left his little shack. He had made good that boast of his to Marie, that a man who could not cover fifty miles in a day, if put to it, was no man at all. Since sleeping he had now walked a good fifty-five miles. But, though walking just as fast as ever, he was constrained to admit to himself that he was getting wofully tired.

Bouchet's house was in a small, deep bay of Great Slave Lake. It was sheltered from the east by a little hill and the green forest.

BOUCHET had just fed the dogs that morning—seven in number, of which three were Musgrave's—with their usual meal of fish. He leaned against the little kitchen of his house and watched them eat it. Suddenly one, Rags by name, a great shaggy brute belonging to Musgrave, lifted his head, pricked his ears and sprang forward, barking loudly. The others followed him. Bouchet glanced after them and up the hill. At the same instant the tall figure of a man just topped it and showed black against the sky. A minute later and Musgrave stood before him.

"Red!" exclaimed the older man. "Be gosh! ees dat you?"

"What's left of me," said Musgrave.

As they shook hands the younger man laughed a little.

"What's the news? Where you come from anyhow? Be gosh! You come lak de wolf, bing-bang, right here. I never see you at all. Rags he see you, for sure he's goot fellow, dat Rags. 'Woof, woof,' he say He's not angree at all, jess glad. Be gosh! I lak dat dog, dat Rags. Well, what's de news anyhow? Where you come from? Be gosh! Marie an' de ole woman be glad to see you, but where you come from?"

"Dead Rabbit Lake."

Musgrave stood before him and pulled the ice from his mustache, while he watched the older man with grave eyes. Old Bouchet always puzzled and amused the younger

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man with his French vivacity and enthusiasm, his proneness to laughter, his little tricks of gesticulation. He always seemed almost childishly frivolous to the tall young Scotchman with his seriousness, and a queer, dour Covenanter strain.

"Is Marie well?" he asked.

"Fine;" her father replied, adding, "she's 'sleep now, be gosh! She shump when she see you—shump six feet!"

"You mustn't waken her," said Musgrave.

He kicked his snow-shoes off as he spoke.

"You not breakfast, I guess, what's dat?"

Musgrave shook his head.

"Be gosh! You boys you run all day, all night for de gals. Ho, ho, ho!" Old Bouchet laughed loudly at his own joke, then, turning, he led the way into the kitchen and Musgrave followed him.

CHAPTER IV

MAID MARIE

BOUCHET'S house was a snug little one, built of logs, double-roofed and well-banked.

The two men walked through the kitchen and into a fair-sized living-room. The bedrooms, two in number, were up a little stairway, under the slanting roof.

On entering the room Bouchet turned and looked his visitor over.

"I t'ink somehow you tired, ees dat right? What's dat?"

Musgrave was fain to admit that he was right. The older man pointed to a big, home-made easy chair and told him to sit down, with which he was very glad to comply. Bouchet lighted his pipe and for a minute or two smoked in silence, but all the while his shrewd eyes were on Musgrave's face. He spoke again:

"I t'ink you walk furder dan Dead Rabbit Lake. Ees it not so, what's dat?"

Musgrave shrugged.

"I walked twenty miles before I started from my shack."

"Eh, what ees dat? Be gosh! You walk near sixty mile. What ees de matter—any-t'ing go wrong, Red?"

For a moment Musgrave was silent, then he said,

"A carcajou has struck my line."

The real misfortune he would tell Marie first.

"A carcajou?" The older man stared. "Dat ees bad, *nom d'un chien!* A carcajou, but it ees not so bad neither. You not cry for dat, Red. I tell you how you feex him, *bien*, plenty."

Musgrave smiled.

"Dat's right, be gosh! I tell you sure. You stay here one month, help wid de chores. Starve de ole son of a gun out. Dat's easy—easy as roll off de log. Dat feex heem plenty, sure t'ing, eh, what's dat?"

"It's about the only thing I can do."

Musgrave thrust his long legs out to their fullest extent and leaned back.

"I t'ink maybe you lak to sleep a little, eh, what's dat?"

Musgrave looked at him.

"Yes," he said, "I would like to sleep a little."

A spare bed stood in a corner of the room, which, when not in use by anybody, was generally strewn with the work of Madame and Marie. That morning a half made rabbit-skin blanket covered a portion of it. Being near the stove, it was also occupied by a pan of rising bread, enveloped in a gray blanket and a warm petticoat belonging to Madame. While Bouchet removed the things, and otherwise prepared the bed, Musgrave took off his moccasins and coat, then, with a final injunction to the older man to call him as soon as his wife and daughter were stirring, he lay down and in a few minutes was sleeping dreamlessly.

It is perhaps needless to say that Bouchet had no idea at all of calling Musgrave when his wife and daughter got up. He had sense enough to see that the young man was nearly worn out and needed rest above all things, and decided that he should have it.

HALF an hour later, when Madame and her daughter were moving about up-stairs and talking, Bouchet returned again to the room. At the sound of their voices he climbed the laddel-rike stairs until his head was above the upper floor, when there immediately followed a whispered conversation punctuated with many feminine exclamations and delighted giggles from Marie.

A few minutes after Bouchet had backed carefully down again he was followed by his wife and daughter. The latter was a

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pretty, slight girl of eighteen, with big, black eyes and quantities of dark hair.

As Marie tiptoed through the room and into the kitchen she stole a swift, shy glance at the figure on the bed. A charming hint of smiles and love added a depth and softness to her eyes and touched her pretty lips. Perhaps the psychic sense in the man was aware of that loved presence, for as she passed he smiled and murmured in his sleep.

At that season of the year, every day at noon the sun peeped over the horizon for a little while at that sleeping, frozen world. Then it would disappear, to leave a lingering, lovely twilight. When that, too, died, those radiant, shimmering Northern Lights replaced it. So that if those hardy souls living in that land have a longer night than they who live in warmer and more comfortable latitudes, it is seldom really dark, while much of the time it is nearly as light as our more Southern day.

It was but a little after six in the morning when Musgrave lay down for his much-needed sleep. Now at the head of his bed there was a window, and through it, a little after noon, the peeping sun sent a shaft of level, dazzling light which blazed on Musgrave's face. He moved his head and muttered, but slept on.

Meanwhile the women in the kitchen had set the table for their midday meal, when Madame told her daughter to see if Red still slept. Marie, opening the door, stood in it and peered into the room. Apparently the man was sleeping soundly, for he lay motionless. The girl was just about to close the door when with a sudden movement Red Musgrave sat bolt upright. He blinked in the dazzling shaft of sunlight, yawned and stretched his lean arms, while Marie waited in the doorway with a beating heart.

"*Marie, donnez-moi une grande cuiller, vite, vite, ma chère.*"

Musgrave heard Madame's voice.

"*Oui, Maman,*" Marie replied.

He had not heard that voice in months, and turned—to see a closing door. A moment later he heard her laughter in the kitchen. He glanced at his watch. Then, pushing the blankets from him in haste, stood up. At the same instant Bouchet entered the room.

"Why did you let me sleep so late?" said Musgrave.

Old Bouchet shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"You want sleep v'ry bad, *garçon.* Be gosh, you near dead! You all in, as de Eengleesh say. You kick de bucket, den what me li'l gal say, eh, *garçon? Sacré tonneur!* Eh, what ees dat?"

While the older man talked Musgrave began putting on his moccasins.

"You have a good sleep, Red?"

"Fine!"

"Hungree, I guess so—what's dat?"

"A little."

Red Musgrave looked at him with a bright smile.

"You betcha! ho, ho, ho! Old Joe Bouchet see into de wall of brick most near as far as de odder fellow, as de Yankee man say."

While he talked he cut a pipeful of tobacco. When Old Bouchet was awake and not smoking he was either cutting a pipeful, filling his pipe or cleaning it out. In fact, much of Joe Bouchet's life was occupied with his pipe.

Musgrave, his moccasins on, rose to his feet and walked to the door leading into the kitchen. At the door he paused, for he was very much in love. Then he opened it and entered. And Old Bouchet, in the living-room, where he remained, smiled at the joyous note in Marie's little cry of welcome and the rapturous murmur of her laughter.

THE midday meal was ready when Musgrave entered the kitchen. But the two women were standing at the little window and much interested in something out-of-doors, so did not see him on his entrance. A moment later Marie turned, and it was her joyous welcome that Old Bouchet heard. When Musgrave noted the happiness in her face and thought of the story he must tell her of his loss, he groaned in spirit.

At the meal, although he made a gallant effort to appear himself, he felt that the attempt was not passing muster in Marie's pretty eyes. He felt them, too, upon his face very often during that meal. Then of a sudden Marie became silent and doubtless tortured herself with pictures of the worst. Those pictures to her, as with all true women, held no thought of fortune or the lack of it. Her fortune was his love!

Madame, too, began to have a suspicion

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that all was not as it should be, for, though Musgrave had ever been a quiet fellow, he was far from being a silent one. His quietness hitherto had been a happy state that radiated about Marie and enveloped her like sunshine—a living, garrulous silence that whispered continually to her of love, and of her indescribable dearness. But today it was different, very different indeed, Marie told herself, and her heart ached at the telling.

Meanwhile Red Musgrave suffered poignantly, and by the time the meal was finished the thought of having to tell Marie of the loss of that precious fox-skin of his had assumed proportions that appalled. For after all, poor man, he had but a slight acquaintance with the girl he loved. The material Marie perhaps he knew, or knew as well as the average fool does the object of his brainless adoration. But, alas! that other Marie he had never seen at all, or only in brief glimpses that vanished quickly and shyly as a thought, for her soul was as modest as her body and would have been just as shocked if it were seen not properly attired.

At length the meal was finished and old Bouchet had pushed his chair back and was filling his pipe. Marie had begun to remove the dishes, too, when her mother stopped her, saying,

"Go 'way, child, to de odder room an' talk wid your fellah. *Pauvre garçon, il est très fatigué et triste, je pense.*"

Madame looked at Musgrave, caught his eye and laughed her merry, hearty laugh.

"Come, Marie," said Musgrave, standing up. He looked at her with a grave kindliness. For a moment she was silent, hesitating, with her eyes upon his face. Then she walked into the other room and Musgrave followed her, closing the door behind him. When she reached the middle of the floor she paused a moment and gave a little shiver.

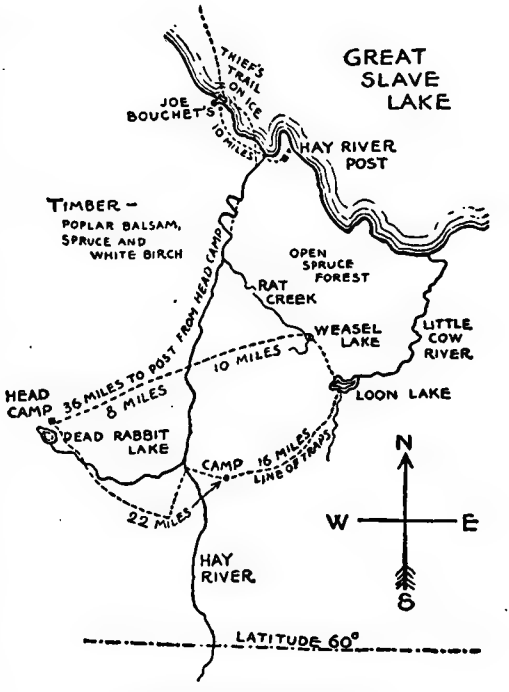
"It is cold," she said.

Marie spoke English more easily and fluently than did either of her parents.

Musgrave put some wood into the stove which stood at the foot of the bed he had occupied. When he rose to his height again Marie was facing him.

"Red," she put a hand out to him, "what has happened? Tell me."

His hand closed over hers. He drew her to him. Then he gathered her almost fiercely into his strong arms and kissed her again and again with a passionate tenderness that thrilled her. She withdrew from his embrace, though his hands still rested upon her shoulders. There was a deep color in her face, while the light of love and happiness made a glory in her eyes. Her lover was about to speak. With a pretty gesture she laid a finger on his lips.



MUSGRAVE'S TRAIL

"Red," she said, "dear old Red, nothing at all has happened, at least nothing that really counts," and the laugh that rounded off her sentence was the prettiest sound in life, for it was the laughter of a happy woman. But even after that he hesitated, for he could not realize the beauty of woman's generosity.

"But, Marie, it is the most terrible thing that could have happened." Then Marie laughed again. "Come sit beside me while I tell you."

They sat together on a rough, homemade lounge while he put his arm about her waist and she leaned her head upon his shoulder.

"Yes, dear."

She took his free hand in both of hers.

"I should have known better, of course;

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it was all owing to my dreadful stupidity—I——"

Once more he paused.

"Yes, dear." She waited for a full minute and he did not speak. The loss of that precious fox-skin represented the loss of his all, his fortune; a loss for which he blamed himself most keenly. Of a sudden Marie sat straight up and turning in his encircling arm she faced him.

"Red," she said, "what ees it which troubles you? Tell me, Red. It ees not the worst, *cherie*. I can stand it."

"Marie, nothing could be worse."

She shook her head. "The worst would kill me, dear. I'm still alive! Now tell me, dear. I am just crazee, can't you see? Mon Dieu! What ees it, Red?"

"The silver-fox skin's gone, Marie!"

"EES that all? *Pauvre garçon!*" The relief upon her face shone like the light of dawn.

Red Musgrave stared.

"You frighten me real bad," she continued, before he had time to say a word. "You know what I think, at dinner? I not think it when you come in here an' kiss me; no, for sure, I not think it. I know she's all right then, but at dinner I'm near dead with the scare. Why, you fooleesh man, I think you not love me no more."

"Marie!"

"True, true, Red. At dinner you're solemn lak a meenister. I tell you, Red, I'm seek, I'm so 'fraid."

Then Musgrave told her all about the theft, and she comforted him as only a woman can, for she loved him.

"And now what are you going to do, Red?"

"Do! Why, Marie, I'm after him. He came this way, you know."

"He did not pass the house, Red, sure thing. You did not trail him here?"

Then Musgrave told her how far he had trailed him, and how easily his trail was followed because of the snow-shoes he wore.

"He'll change them snow-shoes unless he's one big fool, Red."

"He hasn't yet," said Musgrave.

Then he thought of the discarded string he had found, and taking it from his pocket showed it to Marie, asking her what kind of deerskin it was. She examined it carefully, taking it to the window.

"It is not deerskin at all," she said; "it is beaver-skin."

Musgrave moved quickly to her side and looked at it again, then at her.

"Marie, you're smart; but what makes you think so?"

She flushed slightly and laughed.

"I'll tell you, Red, but you mustn't be mad; promise now, my big boy." She looked into his eyes and smiled.

"Well?"

"Not till you promise, Red."

She put her head on one side, her bright eyes dancing. Her lover thought she looked adorable.

"And if I promise will you kiss me?"

She nodded.

"I promise," he said, and turned to her.

She stood on tiptoe and taking his face between her hands she kissed him on the lips.

"Ah, you women!" said Musgrave and took her in his arms again.

"The *Bon Dieu* make us so, *cherie*." She laughed as she pushed him gently from her, saying as she did so,

"Now I will tell you. Last Fall, before it freeze up, Alphonse Pecaud—maybe you know Alphonse?"

Red Musgrave shook his head.

"Well Alphonse, he's a big man, black mus-tache, black eyes, teeth white lak the snow, red cheek. I tell you, Red, he's v'ry pretty man. He say he come to shoot the li'l duck, in the marsh." A look of mischief had crept into Marie's handsome eyes. "He say, too, he love the li'l duck. One day he say to me, 'Marie, you are a li'l duck.' So I say to him, 'Maybe, Alphonse, but I'm not your li'l duck.' You not mad, are you, my big Red?"

Musgrave shrugged his broad shoulders. "Go on, go on, *'tit singe*." He had learned a word or two of French from Marie.

"Well, the big Alphonse wear strings on his moccasins made of beaver-skin. I see him often. One day he give me one pair, and say to me, 'Marie, you wear them, beaver-strings some class, you betcha.' My! but he's funnee man that big Alphonse! But I loose him—the strings I mean. He ees a half-breed, Alphonse, and live v'ry far away, at Fond du Lac, Lake Athabasca. He's well feexed, my ole fader say."

"He came after you, not ducks, I think," said Musgrave with some gloom.

"No," Marie shook her head. "He's got

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a girl, he tell me all about her; 'li'l thing,' he say. He call her Josephine, he talk about her all the time; he love her much, I think. She live at Fort Chipewyan. Her fader he work for that rich trader. But tell me, Red, do you know the man who steal your fox-skin?"

Musgrave shook his head.

"Don't you know what he looks lak?"

"He is a short man with gray hair, he smokes cigarettes rolled in brown paper, he wears snow-shoes with turned-up toes and my deerskin strings in his moccasins. He has only two dogs in his team. one much larger than the other and—and—that's about all I do know about him." He shrugged his shoulders.

"*Mon Dieu*, Red, but that ain't nothin'."

"It sure ain't much," he assented with a grin.

"An' you never seen him at all?"

"Lord love you, Marie! D'you suppose I'd be after him now if I'd ever seen him?"

"Yesterday afternoon while fader he cut fire-wood on the island he see a man pass on the north trail with a dog-team."

"Was he speaking to him? What sort of a man was he? But hold on. Which way was he traveling?"

"North, I think, but I not pay much attention. I'll call fader; he's in the kitchen."

She immediately did so.

A MINUTE or two later old Bouchet joined his daughter and Musgrave in the front room and the latter questioned him. After he had answered several satisfactorily, Musgrave put the following:

"What sort of a looking man was he?"

"Short, not fat, not t'in, wit' a beard."

"Old man?"

"Non, but ees not young. Maybe fifty year hold. Hees beard she ees gray, not v'ry gray, but good many gray 'airs. I'm sorry for heem 'cause he look tired, an' says I, 'Come to de house an' I give you li'l snack,' an' says he, 'T'ank you, but I'm not hungree.' 'Dat's all right,' says I. 'Suit yourself, my friend; dis ees a free countree,' I says."

"What kind of shoes did he wear?"

"He didn't wear no shoes when I see heem. You see the trail she's v'ry hard on de lak'. His shoes was on de load, I guess."

"What kind of a team did he have?"

Musgrave felt when he put this question that it would decide much. In the North a man's team is noticed above all things.

"Ah, that I can tell you *vrai*, true, 'cause I think it funnee a man travel the trail wit' only two dog, one fine, big fellah, *très fort, je pense*. Den dere is anoder t'ing 'bout dat man: he haf no t'umb on his left hand."

"No thumb!" exclaimed Musgrave.

Old Bouchet shook his head.

"Was he French, English or what?"

Old Bouchet shrugged.

"I can not say *vraiment*. Maybe Eengleesh, maybe Yankee? French, *bien, non, certainement*, jess plain Canadian, *je pense*. But what you want to know for, you want heem?"

"About what time was it when he passed?"

"It was jess—but hol' on now, Red. *Eh bien*, I tell you now. I jess goin' to knock off for suppere when he come along. Dat was about seex o'clock."

"And I arrived here at six this morning, just twelve hours afterward." Musgrave looked at his watch. "And now it is just two o'clock, which adds a little more to his start, but he, too, must rest." He looked from one to the other with a bright smile.

Old Bouchet was about to address the younger man, for he was getting very curious, but he caught his daughter's eye and, instead, lounged out of the room again.

"Well, Red, what do you think?" Marie inquired.

"Your father was talking with the man I want, Marie."

"I think so, too, but will you ever catch him, dear?"

"You bet I will!" He laughed.

"When will you have to start?"

"I should have started half an hour ago."

"Ah, Red!"

"Indeed I should, Marie."

The girl leaned toward him and took his hand in hers.

"You must not leave your Marie yet, for a little while; you won't, will you, *cherie*?"

They had drawn a little apart from each other on Old Bouchet's entrance. As the girl leaned toward him, pleading, she was very alluring; her nearness, her beauty, the tender homely term of endearment stirred him deeply. He put his arm about her and drew her to him, he kissed her on the

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lips, he stroked her hair and pressed his cheek against it. Suddenly she threw her arms about his neck and pulled his face to hers.

"Do not leave me yet," she whispered.

A little while afterward, just as he was leaving her, she said to him,

"You must not hurt that man, Red. Remember how strong you are and how big. If you catch hold of him in a rage you'll kill him sure. He ees wicked—give him a chance to repent, forgive him an' the *Bon Dieu* will forgive you."

But to those words Red Musgrave did not reply.

CHAPTER V

THE TRAIL TO FORT PROVIDENCE

THE fine weather still held. The night was calm, cloudless and almost as clear as day. The heavens were a blaze of dancing light and it was very cold, but Musgrave's whole body was in a glow of warmth as he strode behind his team—for he had taken his dogs and a camping-outfit from Bouchet's.

The trail was in excellent condition, packed hard by a recent body of Indians journeying from the north, and about the time that Musgrave was opposite a long, low-lying point some ten miles or so from Bouchet's house, Marie was kneeling beside her little bed and asking the Virgin to watch over her tall lover and intercede for him. And thus, perhaps oftener than we are aware, some dear woman makes life kinder for a man.

At the outlet of Great Slave Lake, which is the head-waters of Mackenzie River, lies Big Island, a favorite camping-ground of travelers on that trail. The lower end of Big Island was distant quite thirty miles from Bouchet's house, and it was reckoned half-way to Fort Providence. Musgrave had made up his mind that the thief would in all likelihood work his way down the Mackenzie and eventually dispose of the skin at one of the trading-posts. There was the chance, and on that chance he was depending, that the thief might remain somewhere in the country, trapping, and not sell any furs until the following Spring. If he did that, Musgrave felt that he might eventually recover his stolen property. With that idea in his mind he had determined upon the following plan of action:

He would make the best time he could down the Mackenzie to Fort Norman, if necessary, and warn all the Hudson Bay Posts along the route and so prevent the sale of it, and if possible have the thief detained should he come to sell. The trip he contemplated, if he did not overtake the thief, was quite five hundred miles from Bouchet's, or one thousand to Fort Norman and return.

Besides the Company-posts there were three stores of free-traders: one on Lake Kakisa, some twenty-five or thirty miles up Beaver River; another at the lower end of Little Lake, a widening of Mackenzie River; a third eight or ten miles up Blue Fish River, a small stream emptying into the Mackenzie, opposite Fort Simpson.

But Musgrave felt certain that the thief would only have a chance of getting cash for the skin at a Hudson Bay Post, and cash he was nearly sure to want.

Musgrave reckoned that if he had to go to Fort Norman and return the trip would take him quite six weeks, allowing for probable delays, or till the middle of April. In all that distance there were but four Hudson Bay Posts to visit, namely: Fort Providence; Fort Simpson, at the mouth of the Liard River; Fort Wrigley and Fort Norman, at the junction of Great Bear River with the Mackenzie.

All that brilliant night as he strode along and the cold snow creaked beneath his moccasins and his eye scanned the illimitable white stretch on either hand, he thought of the weary and relentless miles that lay before him. He thought, too, of his quest. He thought of that cunning thief who labored on in advance of him with thousands of square miles of trackless waste in which to hide. It bespoke the strength, the iron resolution and the indomitable courage in the man that he dared to hope, and never for an instant faltered in his purpose.

Perhaps, too, the thought of the girl waiting for him, trusting in him, was the spiritual uplift that spurred him on and made him feel that ultimate failure was never even to be contemplated. The task before him was a hard one. But so, he had often told himself, was every task in life that was worthy of a man.

Always, too, before him Musgrave could see the trail of the two dogs and the runners of the sled, for no one had traveled

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that way since the thief had passed, while those last on the trail had journeyed south. Thus far everything had gone very smoothly and without a hitch, and Bouchet's meeting with the man he wanted had been most fortunate. That left hand without a thumb was a brand impossible to disguise, so Musgrave told himself.

AT MIDNIGHT Musgrave halted his dogs and, sitting on his sleigh, ate a meal of bread and frozen deer-meat. Afterward he filled and lighted his pipe, then—on again!

He could now see Big Island ahead of him, distant about five miles. It was a high rocky island thickly wooded with balsam, spruce and poplar. In its broadest part it was a good two miles, and in length about five. Big Island is overrun with hares, which is doubtless the reason why it is so popular among the Indians as a camping-ground. Two or three miles below the end of Big Island there is another speck of land, small and low, covered with spruce, called Owl Island by the Indians. Upon the latter Musgrave had camped several times before, and he determined to do so this time. Your true bushman ever has a sneaking fondness for his old camping-grounds, and will go a mile or so out of his way to reach one.

In a little bay of Owl Island, about halfway down it and by the edge of a thick clump of second-growth balsam, there stands a dry rampick, or dead tree. The top of it is broken off and near it there is a heavy branch, at the junction of which with the main trunk there is a fish-hawk's nest, or was five years ago. The rampick marked a place where Musgrave had camped the Autumn previously, when he was netting whitefish for the Winter. It was about three o'clock in the morning when he guided his dogs to a cleared space among the balsams. Some poles sticking out of the snow marked the position of his former camp.

First of all, Musgrave turned his attention to the dogs, which he unharnessed and fed with a generous supply of fish. Next, with a snow-shoe, he cleared all the snow away from a space about ten feet square. The snow was a good four feet in depth, so that when he had cleared and banked it on the sides he stood in an excavation, the walls of which reached to his shoulder. To windward, in the snow, he stuck four slight poles at a slant. He could only detect the direction of the faint, crisp air-current by wetting a finger in his mouth and holding it up, when the side to the draft immediately became cold. He then spread an oblong of canvas, about five feet by eight, around and over the poles.

In fine Winter weather, in the Northern bush, this is a favorite way of camping, because of its quickness, warmth and comfort, for the canvas so placed serves the purpose of a reflector, keeping the space beneath it delightfully warm. Next he cut a good supply of balsam-boughs, which he spread in layers to the thickness of several inches under the canvas. There only remained the fire-wood to cut.

Selecting a small, standing dead tree—lying timber always being damp—he felled it, with several others, chopping them into lengths of about five feet. This was the most, or perhaps the only, arduous work in his preparations for the night.

In a surprisingly short time he had a great heap of wood cut and stacked within easy reach of his bed. He arranged and started a cheery fire in the excavation, before the leaning canvas, and filled his kettle with snow. In a few minutes water was boiling. Then he placed a frozen quarter of caribou, which he had got from Bouchet, before the blaze to thaw, so that he would be able to cut some meat from it. While it was thawing he spread his sleeping-bag, and his camp was made.

Meanwhile the dogs, having finished their meal, made themselves comfortable by burrowing into the deep snow.

It was nearly half-past four in the morning when Musgrave lay down, and shortly after seven he was up again. He had determined to do his traveling in the daytime and not by night, although there was but little difference between them at that season of the year. An hour or so after his rising he was ready for the trail again. He reckoned that with ten hours traveling he should reach Fort Providence.

Thus far Musgrave had been wonderfully fortunate with regard to weather. It was now four nights and days since any snow had fallen. But doubtless the thief was praying for more snow, for he must have thought it highly probable that the owner of the silver-fox skin would be on his trail.

About three miles below Owl Island,

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Beaver River flows into the Mackenzie. But there were no fresh signs of travel on the Beaver River trail, so Musgrave kept right on.

At the expiration of another two hours or so of travel, on rounding a bend in the river, he sighted three figures and a team of dogs advancing toward him. The three figures resolved themselves into a Yellowknife Indian and two squaws.

THE teams were halted a little apart from one another, and the men, after an interchange of greetings, sat on their respective loads and smoked silently for a time. The Indian, Musgrave noticed, had one ear heavily bandaged with a piece of gray blanket. The women, meanwhile, withdrew to a little distance and talked together in low tones. One was of middle life, with all that ugliness peculiar to native women whose years have been passed in a continual round of drudgery unrelieved by sunshine. The other one, little more than a girl, was in the full flower of a moderate attractiveness, enhanced, in her opinion, by the gaudily colored decorations of a fringed and beaded deerskin shirt.

As the women talked together the younger one stole shy glances at the tall white man, whose appearance doubtless she admired. Once, when the older one noticed those covert glances, she said something and the younger one laughed, flashing a surreptitious glance at the white stranger.

At length Musgrave spoke to the Indian in the Yellowknife dialect:

"The weather is fine and traveling on the ice very pleasant."

"It is even as you say, friend, for the wind sleeps and its breath is soft as the breath of a woman; but we shall have snow soon now, for the tops of the alders are curled and the frost is low on the willows and the water smokes. Of a truth we shall get much snow, and the wind, too, watches in the north."

"Perhaps it is as you say, for we can not expect weather always like this or the world would be too pleasant."

Musgrave paused and for some minutes they smoked in silence.

"The brother of my sister's aunt did see a great owl with a weasel in its claws, three days ago, while the sun looked over the marshes," the Indian remarked gravely.

"What the owl sees no man is able to tell," Musgrave responded, speaking figuratively in the style of a Yellowknife proverb.

"And when he awoke in the morning," the Indian continued, "his belly did grievously complain so that happiness forsook him, and toward the close of the fourth hour, while it was yet early, he did beckon to me, and when I was by the side of his bed he did say, 'Listen, brother,' and I did put my ear close to his mouth and he did say, speaking slowly, 'As fish slumber in deep water when the ice is upon the surface, so will it be with you, my brother.' Then before I could remove my ear he did fasten his teeth in it, and bit it even as a dog might do, and at the close of the sixth hour he did die, and now I and my squaw and the squaw of the brother of my sister's aunt, who is a laughing woman, would journey to the teepee of her uncle, who has great medicine, for we would know the meaning of his words. And it is because of his bite that I wear much blanket upon my ear."

"His words were indeed strange," said Musgrave, "but I am thinking that while you and your squaw and the laughing woman did journey up the river trail you did meet a white man, a small man with much hair about his face, and a team of two dogs, and he did journey as a man will who has journeyed far. Is it not so, friend?"

"I did meet no white man with hair about his face," replied the Indian, shaking his head. "Neither did I meet any man at all, neither white man nor Indian."

"Did you not come, then, from the Company's post?"

The Indian shook his head, saying, "Not since my last sleep. It is but a half-day's easy journey down the river to where my teepee stood upon its bank. But yesterday I did come from the post and I did see the fresh trail of a man and two dogs upon the ice, but he did not stay at the Company's post as he journeyed down the river, but did pass it, keeping the islands between him and it while he did pass."

"I am sorry," said Musgrave, "for I would speak with him."

He bid the Indian "Good day," and continued on his journey.

THAT night, as Musgrave had intended, he camped at Fort Providence. In the evening, while smoking a pipe with the Company's man, he

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told him how a white man had robbed him. He told him, too, that the white man was journeying down the Mackenzie and that he had passed the Post two days before. He then described the thief as carefully as he was able.

The Company's man, who was a Scotchman, Ephraim McMeekin by name, was a solemn and honest individual, sensible with that shrewd common sense which is the boast, while intensifying the ugliness, of little minds. He was a heavily built man, though without fatness, and he was very bald. He was short-sighted, too. In fact he seemed to be inconvenienced by a multiplicity of Providential slights. Notwithstanding, he was a deeply religious man, and never seemed more happy in the daytime than when droning out some whining hymn-tune. He delighted, too, in recounting recollections of one Sandy McPhail, a Presbyterian "meenister of the Kirk" in his native village in the far-away Scottish Highlands.

When Musgrave had told his story, the Scotchman blinked with owl-like solemnity and remarked that it was "ower muckle bad," or words to that effect, adding possibly by way of consolation some abominable Scottish aphorism. But then Musgrave, too, was a Scotchman, so that they may have derived some mutual benefit.

CHAPTER VI

THE GRAY SILENCE

THAT night ominous clouds gathered, overspreading the sky, while from the north a wind arose. During the night snow began to fall, and early the following morning, when Musgrave struggled out of his sleeping-bag, it was still snowing. Something indescribable in the feeling of the air and in the appearance of the tiny flakes which came down with a silent, monotonous persistency presaged a heavy fall.

By the time Musgrave had breakfasted, packed his things and was ready for the day's long tramp, all traces of former travel were obliterated from the trail. As he was starting, a great owl flew past him, noiseless as a shadow. A few minutes later he heard its melancholy hooting from the black woods.

That afternoon, somewhat early to camp, Musgrave reached the store of the free-trader at the lower end of Little Lake—a mere widening of the river. The trader was a breed, and from him Musgrave learned nothing further, and after but a few minutes' delay he continued.

The snow fell steadily all that day and night, but on the morning following the weather was clear again, the sky cloudless. The traveling, though, had changed materially. The going was heavy, and Musgrave once more had to take to his snow-shoes and break trail. Every day, now, he looked forward to meeting with some one. But always as he would round each bend of the river and look eagerly ahead, only another empty reach of white, frozen desolation would meet his eyes, while a silence that would shake a weaker spirit, a silence that was tragic, sinister, ominous, brooded over all. But no; that silence did not always hold the frozen world! Often the hunters of the North—the wolves—held high revelry. Many times did Musgrave hear them on his long march. But, like all bushmen, he despised wolves.

A few miles below the Osockit Sebee (Trout River) he came on two Indians, who were spearing through the ice the fish attracted by a decoy—a fish-skin distended by the force of the current. From them Musgrave hoped to learn something, but he was disappointed, as they had started their fishing only the previous afternoon.

On the evening of the fourth day's travel from Fort Providence he made his camp on the river-bank with two families of Indians who were returning to their hunting-grounds after a week spent at Fort Simpson. That same day, too, they had killed three caribou and so were well supplied with meat. And as is their way, those thriftless nomads were enjoying a gorge, both themselves and their dogs, when Musgrave joined them. They insisted, too, upon his partaking of their feast, while the squaws threw great lumps of meat to his dogs. And as was the way, too, when in the midst of abundance, they were all in the greatest good humor possible, both laughter and a decidedly coarse style of badinage being the order of the day.

That evening, while Musgrave smoked with one family in their drafty teepee, he inquired of them concerning the thief, but was once more disappointed. They had seen nothing of him. Of course they had only left Fort Simpson that morning,

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while the chances were the thief had reached it, and passed on, the night before.

The next morning ere starting he got quite a week's supply of fresh meat in exchange for a little tobacco. This was most fortunate, as otherwise he would have had to waste valuable time in hunting.

A LITTLE after noon that same day he reached Fort Simpson, where he made inquiries; but he could learn nothing. It was beginning to look now as though the thief had vanished from the land and left no trail. The manager of the Post was of the opinion that he had never come that far, or some one of the Indians about would have seen either him or his trail. When Musgrave told him of the theft he viewed it differently, agreeing with him that the thief would take advantage of the night to pass a Post, or go through the woods.

There was one thing, however, Musgrave did find out at Simpson: that no one had visited the Post from the north since the last snowfall. In the morning he could learn if any one had arrived at Blue Fish. If so, he would once more have a trail to follow. And if there was no trail, why then it would be useless for him to continue any farther, for he would undoubtedly have passed the thief.

For the past three days the weather had been fine, and if it would only remain so for another day Musgrave would know for certain whether the thief was still ahead of him. But it was not to be. That evening he had visited the Hudson Bay Post and upon his return later he had anxiously scanned the vast star-pricked dome. In its depths he could see no cloud or sign of change. The stars glittered frostily, the Northern Lights shone with as magnificent a brilliancy as usual, though he noticed, with some misgiving, that heavy clouds were piled low in the North and West. He noticed, too, a little wind had sprung up, a cold, bitter, penetrating wind from the East. Several times, too, he heard wolves howl, while earlier in the afternoon he had seen the owls about.

The next morning he awakened to find it snowing heavily and, judging from the amount that had fallen, it must have been snowing during the greater part of the night. The cold, too, was extreme, while the light breeze of the night before had increased to a strong wind. It looked as though the very elements were fighting for the thief.

Musgrave ate his breakfast that morning in the falling snow and biting cold. The little fire he made to boil some water for his coffee seemed only big enough to accentuate the freezing air and lonely frozen outlook. It did not take him long to finish his meal. The dogs, on hearing him moving, forsook their beds and sat or lay, or dejectedly walked about with drooping tails.

The surrounding outlook was dim, weird, circumscribed in the semi-blackness of that clouded night. The dirge-like soughing of the wind in the spruce and poplar by which his encampment was surrounded seemed fitting music for the gloomy forest. A merry tune in such surroundings would have hurt, one would think. The very air was sad; the perpetual silence of that falling snow, seen for an instant in a gleam of firelight, was sadder still. The pensive gray of heaven, too, with the ebon blackness of the mourning trees, all helped to paint a picture in a dull monochrome of melancholy.

Of a sudden, out of the North, from that solitude of forest and frozen desolation, there came the deep-toned howling of a wolf. To Musgrave, the solitary wilderness was so accustomed a home that he was hardly aware of that howl. To him it was but a voice of Nature, of his home. He sat upon his heels before his fire and tossed some scraps of bread and meat, with a cheery word, to each dog in turn. Their real meal would not be till evening.

After his breakfast he started for the Blue Fish trading-store, which was some five miles up the stream bearing that name. That morning he found the cold greater than it had been for many weeks. He even found it difficult to keep his weather-beaten face from freezing. Half a dozen times while crossing the river against a wider sweep of wind and driving snow he had to stop and turn his back to the gale and rub his stiffening cheeks into some degree of warmth again.

The storm was delaying him greatly for, without a trail to follow, his dogs would not go in advance.

At the Blue Fish trading-store he could learn nothing. The trader, an American, expressed himself as sure that Musgrave had passed the man.

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"You think I passed him near Fort Providence when it snowed, I suppose?" said Musgrave.

"Sure thing," the American replied, adding, "Why, pardner, if he'd *ordered* that thar little skift o' snow, it couldn't 'a' been handier! All he'd had to do was to mosey up some little crick or river, an' then, where are you? Why, it's easy as skinnin' eels, heh? I reckon, pardner, if any man o' gumption had that pelt o' yours, you'd never see it ag'in, an' that ain't no idle dream."

"Has any one been up the river lately, or down it?" Musgrave next inquired.

"There ain't been no one up nor down it for near a week that I knows on," was the reply.

And Musgrave thought of the falling snow and groaned in spirit. If it had only held off for one more day! Certainly, thus far, the luck seemed with the thief.

"But there is the off chance that he may have gone on down the river," Musgrave insisted.

"There sure is," responded the American, with a slow drawl, "if he's anyways ambitious to im-port furs to the Arctic Ocean for the benefit o' the Huskies; but it do seem to me plumb redic'lous on the face o' it. Now if it had o' been me, it'd be Athabascay Landin' I'd be hittin' for. But you ain't never goin' on this soon, be you?" he said as Musgrave rose to his feet. "Best set round a spell an' smoke, an' about noon I'll give you as nice a little snack o' beaver-tail as ever you seen. Ketched him meself last week. You sure best stay. Cain't, eh?" as Musgrave declined. "Well, I'm real sorry about that pelt o' yours, an' if that white-livered swine comes round here tryin' to trade it, I'll sure give him trade! But I do wish you wasn't in such a' outrageous rush. Well, so-long, pardner. Since you can't stay, the best o' luck to you. Call ag'in!"

So Musgrave left the kind-hearted and hospitable American and bent his head once more to the wind and snow.

CHAPTER VII

WHITE MAN'S SNOW-SHOES

ALL that day the storm continued. Late in the afternoon the wind fell, but the snow came down more heavily than ever. The temperature moderated. That night Musgrave made a very snug camp for himself in a thick clump of balsam, but only twenty-five miles below Fort Simpson.

The day following was a Sunday. Early in the morning the snow ceased falling, the clouds rolled away and the stars came out. The broad river once again lay before him an unbroken sheet of white, without a mark or footprint upon its smooth surface.

Despite the remarks of the hospitable American with regard to the importation of furs to the Arctic regions, Musgrave was determined to go on as far as Fort Wrigley. If he did not find the thief there or hear of him he felt that the chances were he would learn something to determine him one way or the other.

All the two following days, a Monday and Tuesday, he tramped on doggedly, hurriedly, his great swinging strides making but little of the miles.

The formation of the country was now changing. To the eastward it was becoming rather more hilly than rolling, while the upper portions of the hills were in many instances bare of trees. The river-banks, too, were higher, steeper, more broken and rugged, while to westward a range of high hills, rising almost to the dignity of mountains, converged toward the river. They were in reality the eastern foot-hills of the Rocky Mountains.

On Wednesday about noon he met two dog-teams with their human complement of Indian men and squaws. They had stopped for their midday meal. The dogs stretched upon the snow were resting comfortably. The men seated on the loads were chatting and enjoying a smoke, while the squaws were bustling about, energetically chopping wood and making fires.

Musgrave, too, decided to stay with them for his luncheon and smoke, to see what information, if any, he could gain. But from the Indians he learned nothing except that they had visited the Post four days previously, having come from their Winter hunting-grounds, in the neighborhood of Great Willow Lake, to the Mackenzie and thence on to the Post. So that even supposing the thief had traveled along the ice two days in advance of Musgrave, his time of doing so had very neatly dovetailed in between the coming of the Indians and the fall of snow. And thus did fortune again favor the thief, apparently.

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For quite an hour after he had finished his meal, Musgrave sat chatting and smoking with the Indians. There remained now only about twelve miles to the Post, with a good trail all the way. When he did at length start he swung his dogs into line and mounted his lightly loaded sleigh. Although they had been traveling steadily now for a number of days, the load had been a light one, and the work only sufficient to keep them in condition without tiring them. At a sharp word of command from Musgrave they sprang into their collars, with a joyous yelp of excitement, and away they went at a gallop. An hour and a half afterward, on rounding a slight bend of the river, they saw the lights of Fort Wrigley.

THE Post was built on the eastern bank, facing the foot-hills, which at that point slope down to the very edge of the Mackenzie River. The man in charge was a tall, solemn-faced Scotchman, who informed Musgrave that no such man as he was looking for had passed down the river. Then Musgrave told him of the theft, and that he suspected the fellow would avoid all the Posts by passing them in the bush. While they talked a half-breed lounged into the store and was immediately addressed in a friendly manner by the man in charge, who then turned to Musgrave and remarked,

"Edward Sayers, here," indicating the new arrival, "can tell you whether any one has traveled down the river in the last four days, for he has just now arrived from Fort Norman. In fact he has been on the trail nearly five days. One of his team went footsore a day out from the Post, and he was delayed some time resting the dog."

Musgrave at once questioned the breed and learned from him that no man had been either up or down the river during the time mentioned. So that he was satisfied at last, beyond a doubt, that he had passed the thief.

That night as he sat smoking by his camp-fire he thought of his long, fruitless journey and of the miles of weary travel which still lay before him. He knew now that his precious fox-skin, with which he could have done so much, was gone beyond the shadow of a hope, and his marriage postponed indefinitely. He thought of the days he had spent in pressing forward, hurrying at his best endeavor to the north and so ever widening the distance between himself and the thief. He laughed bitterly.

The thief had been too clever for him, after all. He told himself that he was now probably at Edmonton, enjoying the fruit of his adventure. Musgrave ground his teeth in futile rage. The thought, too, that he would have to return to Marie, who had confidence in his success, and tell her that he had failed, was an added drop of bitterness.

Musgrave was not of that type of man who take failure lightly. However, there was no use in crying over spilt milk, or tiring himself needlessly by sitting up half the night bewailing his disappointment. There was work in plenty yet before him. He rose and stretched his lean, strong arms, then proceeded to make himself comfortable for the night.

When Musgrave rose the following morning the sky was cloudless. The stars were brilliant in the deep blue vault. The Northern Lights danced madly in a shimmering blaze of splendor. The long reach of river gleamed with an unearthly purity in that white light. The heaped tumuli of piled mountains showed in endless white-capped raggedness to westward, the savage boundary of a frozen world. The morning was very cold, while everything was wrapped in that brooding stillness; a stillness that seemed to suggest an end of all things mundane, the littleness of human endeavor and its melancholy.

It was early that morning when Musgrave started up the river on his return trip, with a light load and eager dogs. He had a well-beaten trail now, so that when he was not being hauled upon his sleigh he had to run behind it to keep up. The distance from Fort Wrigley to Fort Simpson was reckoned to be about one hundred and twenty miles, and he made the distance in two days and a half.

By evening of the following day, a Saturday, another fifty miles lay behind him. That night he was camped on the west bank of the Mackenzie, a little below the mouth of Trout River. The weather still held fine.

THE following morning, as he passed the river-mouth, he noticed the fresh trail of a team of dogs and men coming down Trout River. It intersected with the one he was following, and

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kept along it for a mile or so, when it made for the opposite bank. Just as Musgrave was about to leave it something unusual about the trail attracted his attention.

He halted his dogs and going back examined it. With but little difficulty he made out that the team consisted of three dogs, while the snow-shoe trail was made by two persons. Musgrave examined it closely, but at that point the two had walked in single file, stepping in each other's footprints. He judged, too, that the trail was at least two days old, but as no snow had fallen since it was sufficiently distinct.

One had walked ahead, breaking trail, then the dogs and sled had followed, and the other man. A little farther on he came to where the snow was beaten more firmly by the wind. At this point the team had halted and lain down, and the two accompanying it had walked away separately. The two trails, now, were sufficiently distinct, stamped clearly as print upon a page. And the snow-shoes worn by one of them were the same as those worn by the thief!

For several minutes Musgrave looked at the trail. He noted the unusual width of the shoe beneath the ball of the foot, and how the impression on the snow ended just in front of the forward wooden cross-bar, showing the turned-up toes.

Of two things Musgrave was now satisfied: The snow-shoes were those worn by the thief, or a pair exactly like them. But it was most unlikely that there would be two such pairs of shoes worn in the same part of the country and at the same time. In the second place, the shoes were now being worn by an Indian! His trained eye had at once apprised him of that fact. To such men as Musgrave the difference between an Indian's trail and that of a white man is very plain indeed. An Indian always turns his feet in while walking, doubtless owing to his having passed much of his babyhood strapped to a board with his feet in that position.

It is perhaps needless to say that Musgrave decided, immediately on recognizing the trail, upon following it up. It did not necessarily mean that because they had crossed the river two days earlier they were two days' travel in advance, even supposing that they were traveling. Unless an Indian is hurried—and it is next to impossible to hurry one—his day's travel in the bush rarely exceeds from eight to ten miles.

With an Indian, time does not count. Time he looks upon as his to dispose of as he likes. The full-blooded Indian in the wilderness is a gentleman. He may be ragged, dirty and evil-smelling, but he is a gentleman. His life is a lounge. Starvation alone will move him. He may be a vagrant and he is a mendicant, but as the last he is dignity personified. If you give him food or tobacco, you recognize immediately his condescension as the recipient. He is polite at all times, intensely polite. He would stab you to the heart politely—if he dared. His manners are magnificent.

A little while afterward Musgrave had crossed the river and was following the Indian's trail through the bush, where the trees were both stunted and scattered with but little underbrush. The trail now headed for the Horn Mountains, a low range some fifteen miles distant. Early that afternoon he arrived at the first camp of the Indians after leaving the river. A circle of standing teepee-poles marked the place.

Musgrave did not camp there, however, but pushed on for quite another five miles. The character of the country was now changing and becoming more rugged and broken, with a general and ever increasing ascent to the northward, in the direction of the mountains.

That evening Musgrave made his camp in a thick clump of spruce where the Indians had stopped for their midday meal. The next morning, bright and early, he was on their trail again. By noon, through a long valley, he was ascending the mountains. From the little runways everywhere it was evident that hares were in abundance. He often came upon the big, round footprints of the lynx, and occasionally the little trail of the ermine, with its footprints in couples winding over the snow. Twice he came upon mink tracks, like the ermine, though larger, and once he crossed the old trail of a traveling otter.

EARLY that afternoon he made the summit of the hills, and in a deep valley, a little farther on, he suddenly heard the loud barking of dogs. Soon afterward he sighted a teepee, with the smoke from the opening in the roof rising straight up in the still air. An Indian with his head through the doorway spoke sharply to the dogs, who slunk away. A young squaw, in the bush beside the trail,

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loaded a sleigh with fire-wood. As Musgrave passed her he noticed that it was she who wore the turned-up snow-shoes. A little beyond their teepee he made his camp for the night.

That evening, as Musgrave was finishing his supper, the Indian sauntered over and, greeting him in Yellowknife, seated himself upon his heels near the fire. As Musgrave particularly wanted to be friendly, he offered his tobacco, which the Indian gravely accepted. He proceeded to fill his pipe. When it was lighted and going satisfactorily, Musgrave began talking to him.

He discussed the weather at great length and with careful attention to detail. Among those whose lives are passed in the wilderness with but scant protection against the inclemency of the seasons, the weather is ever a topic of much interest. From the weather their conversation naturally and easily gravitated to the depth of the snow, the thickness of the ice upon the rivers and Winter travel generally.

Then Musgrave told a story of the weight and size of a certain load his dogs had hauled one day for a distance of thirty miles, a story which the Indian promptly capped with an account of a performance of his own dogs. Then they talked plain dog for quite half an hour, for in the North men talk dog with as much interest as in the South they talk horse.

And all the while Musgrave was consumed with the desire to know just how and where the Indian had procured those queer turned-up snow-shoes. But to rush headlong into such a subject at the beginning was, Musgrave knew, the best way to learn nothing at all about them, for there is no person living more suspicious than an Indian.

At length the time came when he thought he might indulge his curiosity, and he remarked tentatively,

"I have never before seen snow-shoes like those your woman walks upon."

"I do not know the reason of their shape," said the Indian, and spat into the fire.

"I have not seen such shoes worn in the North. Where do the Indians live who wear them?"

"No Indian wears such shoes. It is the snow-shoe of the white man. It is a fool snow-shoe! But it does for a woman to gather wood upon. Often in my teepee while I smoke my pipe I look upon it and I laugh, but Wild-Bird, who is my woman, says it is a good shoe, light and easy upon the feet. But after all she is but a woman, so what can one expect?" He leaned back and smoked solemnly.

"It is strange to me," said Musgrave, "where you ever saw a man wearing such fool snow-shoes when there were good ones in plenty that he might have had?"

"The white man who wore them," said the Indian, "traps now upon the shore of Osockit Sagin (Trout Lake), at the place where the river runs out of it into Gitchie Sebee—the Mackenzie River—and his tent stands upon the north bank of the river which runs out of the lake. It stands among young balsam-trees. While to keep him warm he burns short wood in an iron box which stands at the foot of his bed, in his tent!"

"Is he mad?" inquired Musgrave.

The Indian shook his head.

"No, he is not mad. He traps well, for he had caught many marten, some fisher and four otter before I and Wild-Bird did leave him."

"What manner of man is he?" next inquired Musgrave. "Is he big or little, old or young?"

"He is a small man and he is not old, neither is he young; but his hair is gray, and in front upon his face he wears much hair which hangs down upon his breast, and it is very gray, and when the wind blows it about he is a strange and horrible sight. Then, too, from that hand," the Indian held up his left hand, "he has lost a thumb. And I did leave Osockit Lake, where the trapping is good, because the little white man did continually look upon my woman, and once when they did think I had gone from the teepee I did come suddenly into it and I did find Wild-Bird seated upon her blankets and before her sat the little white man smoking tobacco wrapped in paper, and Wild-Bird did hold one hand high with the fingers upon it straight up and separated, and with the finger of the other hand she did count the fingers upon the first one, saying slowly, 'Pashic, ne-eesh, 'niswe, newin, no-nun;' while in the eyes of the little white man love burned like a flame. Then after seeing that, I did think that the time had come when I should move my teepee."

"You say that he smokes tobacco wrapped in paper?"

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"Truly, *neigee*, always, and never a pipe, and the paper which he uses is the color of grass when the Winter is coming, and in thinness it is as the wing of the great long fly" (the dragon-fly).

"How long will he trap beside the lake?" inquired Musgrave.

"That I can not tell you," replied the Indian, "for he was unable to speak my tongue, but it is likely that he will remain till the wild geese fly North in the Spring-time."

For a little while they smoked in silence, then Musgrave asked him another question,

"How far is it from Big River to Osockit Lake?"

"You may travel it easily in two days," was the reply.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GRAY MAN

ON THE evening that followed Musgrave was camped again upon the bank of the Mackenzie River by the mouth of the Osockit, and the weather still held fine. All of the two following days he traveled up the Osockit River And on the evening of the second day, which was a Friday, he made his camp within two miles of the lake.

Early the next morning he ate his breakfast and, filling his pipe, he smoked for a little time beside his fire. While he smoked he thought of all the trouble and the wasted time the thief had caused him. For to him, as to any business-man, wasted time meant loss of money.

When he rose at length and knocked the ashes out of his pipe and started on his way again, he had succeeded in kindling within himself a very honest rage. He told himself, too, that the feeling was justifiable, and raged the more. Being a Scotchman, as well as a hunter and a trapper, his honesty was, one might say, trebly ingrained. Which being the case, and his rage honest, he could enjoy it, and doubtless did.

As he tramped over those last two miles he thought of how he would thrash the man, and his lips set in a grim line. As he was passing a group of young birch-trees he halted his dogs on the trail and, stepping up to them, he cut a straight branch of about the length and thickness of the average walking-stick. As he returned to his team he balanced the stick in his hands, then tried it with a whistling stroke through the air, startling the dogs.

He laughed a little, while into his eyes there crept a dangerous light. Had any one suggested that he might find it impossible to thrash the man, he would have smiled. For in all the wide North, thus far, he had never met any one, Indian or white man, who could stand up before him. Was it likely then that this wretched thief, this hop-o'-my-thumb, could do so?

At this stage of his reflections he rounded a bend of the river and sighted the wide stretch of Osockit Lake. A moment later the noisy barking of dogs warned him of an encampment. At the same time he sighted the roof of a small tent standing in the midst of a thick clump of young balsam-trees. A stovepipe emitted a column of smoke, which showed it to be occupied. Musgrave noticed, too, that there were but two dogs, a large and fine one, and one much smaller. He noticed, too, many ends of cigarettes along the beaten trail between the tent and the river, all of which were rolled in brown paper.

Ere leaving the river Musgrave had halted his own team on the ice. The two strange dogs tiptoed about them with tightly curled tails, growling savagely.

When Musgrave reached the door of the tent he paused and twisted his mustache. He could hear some one stirring within; then came the words:

"Who is there?"

MUSGRAVE laughed a little. For the moment he forgot all the weary miles he had traveled. The satisfaction of the successful trailer and hunter of big game was his; the distance he had traveled, the difficulties he had surmounted, the deferred hope, were all but an added zest to the satisfaction of the accomplishment.

He thought of Marie, too, at that supreme moment. After all, her confidence had not been misplaced. He would not have to admit himself a failure. Just then there was triumph in his grim smile, and his eyes were very bright.

He would take the law into his own strong hands, too. After all, what law could there be about the untrodden ways but the law of the strong? Then he thought of the man that he was going to thrash. The man was a fool as well as a thief, for

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with the start he had had he should have got clean away. Undoubtedly he was a fool! He could so easily have doubled back on his trail after the first snow-storm and journeyed south along the frequented paths of white men to Athabasca Landing.

Such thoughts as these thronged in his mind as he began untying the fastening of the tent-door. Again came a challenge from the inmate, but this time with a menace added,

"Who are you? Speak, by ——, or I shoot!"

"A visitor," said Musgrave, and laughed again. The honest Scot could not say "a friend."

He pulled the tent-door open as he spoke and stepped inside. A small, gray-bearded, gray-haired man lay on his back before him, covered with a rabbit-skin blanket. His head and shoulders were propped up upon a couple of filled sacks. Across his legs at the extent of his arms rested a cocked Winchester.

Thus armed, small though he might be, with the backing of some courage, he was most assuredly master of the situation. Had the light been better in the tent Musgrave must have perceived a drawn and haggard look of suffering on his face.

While the former stood at the door, fastening it again, the little man watched him in silence. He continually moistened his lips with his tongue, and once a sudden spasm seemed to wrench his face.

When Musgrave turned to him again he spoke.

"I'm real pleased to see you," he said, "tur'ble pleased, though you do come sudden-like an' onexpected."

He uncocked his rifle as he said the words, and placed it beside him on the balsam-brush with which the floor of the tent was covered.

When Musgrave had fastened the tent-door he turned again to the little man, something in whose position suddenly arrested his attention. He noticed, too, his mutilated left hand, which lay upon the blanket. Musgrave still held the birch stick, while owing to his great height he stooped to avoid the roof. With his eyes the little man indicated a partially filled sack at the side of the tent.

"Thar's fish in that," he said. "The dogs ain't been fed anyways too recent. Jess throw 'em out a wad, stranger. Sufferin' Mantraps! but I'm right pleased to see you."

Musgrave, on his knees beside the sack, paused in the act of taking out some fish.

He looked at the man, then remarked,

"What's ailin' you, anyway?"

"Bellyache," said the man, "a tearin' bellyache."

Again a spasm of pain tightened his lips and brought the sweat out upon his forehead.

Musgrave watched him for a moment in silence. Something moved in the snow about the door of the tent, and he heard a dog whine. The sound aroused him. He drew a couple of fish from the bag and, going to the door, thrust his head and shoulders out. The two dogs sat before the tent, watching it, shivering and whining softly. He spoke to them and threw them the fish, upon which they sprang ravenously.

"Kind o' hungry!" said the man, but Musgrave did not reply.

Then of a sudden he addressed him:

"What is your name?" he inquired.

"Jimmy Weeks," said the man. "But the boys to home never called me nothin' but jess plain Tod."

"Tod," said Musgrave reflectively.

He felt curiously at a loss for anything further to say. The predicament in which he had found the man was so completely outside and beyond his expectations as to throw his mind and determination off their savage balance. He could not thrash a stricken man. He felt that he had been ill-used and cheated. He filled and lighted his pipe and for a few moments smoked in silence.

The man was so very different from what he had expected. A thief should have been a greater brute, but this man was not a brute at all. He was small, weak, polite, and, what made it ten times worse, he was sick. Red Musgrave groaned in spirit. He picked a stick of wood from the brush beside the little sheet-iron stove and put it on the fire. He noticed as he did so that there was no more cut. The sick man was watching him. Musgrave's eye caught his.

"Thar ain't no more," he said.

He laughed a little, then of a sudden checked himself while the pain contorted his face.

"How was you figurin' on gettin' more?" Musgrave inquired.

"I didn't do no figurin'!"

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Again he laughed.

"Ain't the pain no better?"

The man shook his head.

There was an ax in the corner of the tent. Musgrave picked it up and went outside. A moment later the sick man could hear him chopping wood. He worked at his self-imposed task until he had as much cut as would go conveniently into the tent, or sufficient to last for another two or three days.

When Musgrave returned to the tent he moved to the sick man's side, and seating himself on the brush he picked up his rifle. With the lever he ejected the cartridges. The sick man watched him, smiling. He had every confidence now in his visitor, whom he looked upon as a friend. Laying the rifle on one side Musgrave turned to him.

"Jimmy Weeks," he said, "or Tod, or ——"

"I kind o' like Tod best. It's homelier. Minds me o' the boys," he interrupted. He continued ere Musgrave had time to speak, "Jess call me Tod, jess plain Tod, seein' what a good friend you've been to me."

He smiled fatuously.

"Man alive!" exclaimed Musgrave, "I ain't your friend!"

"No," said the man with the same silly smile upon his face, "but you're sure the dead spit o' one."

Musgrave raised his hand.

"Quit!" he said. "You make me sick."

The little man stared.

"DO YOU know what I come for?" he continued ere Weeks could reply. "I come to give you the darndest thrashin' ever a man got." The birch stick he had cut lay beside him. He picked it up. "Do you see that, Jimmy Weeks? I cut that on my way to your camp. What for, do you think? To thrash you with, you dirty thief. You may thank the pain in your guts y' ain't now roarin' with the lickin' I'd 'a' give you." Musgrave leaned toward him, his temper blazing in his eyes. He struck a fist in the palm of his hand. "Where's the silver-fox skin you stole from my shack on Dead Rabbit Lake, Hay River, you sawed-off whittlydig?"

Weeks did not reply.

"You're caught now. You may as well own up. Where is it?"

Still Weeks remained silent.

A heap of valuable fur lay at the head of the sick man's blankets, which Musgrave began turning over. Weeks watched him in silence. A curious expression had come into his eyes, half fearful, half wicked, like that of a trapped weasel. At length he spoke:

"Thar' ain't no pelt o' yours thar," he said.

"Where is it?"

"Maybe I ain't got it an' didn't never take it."

"Where is it?" Musgrave reiterated.

"I ain't got your fox-skin. I ain't never been on Hay River."

"Listen here," said Musgrave. "You passed down Hay River about the beginning of March. You stayed overnight in my shack when I was away. Besides a fox-skin and ten marten-skins, you stole a beaver-castor in a jar hanging from a beam. You were too short to reach it, you little sawed-off runt, so you put a plank with a block on it to stand on. You wore snow-shoes with——"

"So help me, I never seen Hay River."

"You are a liar as well as a thief, I see. But hold on. You wore snow-shoes with turned-up toes. I trailed you to Fort Providence. All that night it snowed hard. You were a day's journey ahead of me, or about the mouth of the Osockit, up which you went. The snow-storm hid your trail, while I went on to Fort Wrigley, —— you! But you should have chucked those snow-shoes, Jimmy Weeks. They gave you away. On my way south again I struck the Indians' trail and followed it. The rest was easy—dead easy. You were a fool. Most of your kind are, I think. No, you don't!"

With a lightning movement he pinned the sick man's hand, beneath his blankets, to his chest.

Then he pulled the blanket down, disclosing a hand gripping a .38 caliber Colt revolver loaded and cocked.

Musgrave laughed as he took it from him and, extracting the cartridges, laid it down beside the rifle.

Again he put the question,

"Where is my silver-fox skin?"

But still the man remained silent.

"If it is in the tent, I'll find it," said Musgrave. "If it isn't, I'll take all of yours." He glanced at the pile of fur as he spoke. "I'll take every skin you've got; every —— one. You have a thousand dollars' worth, I think."

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The man still lay in silence.

Beside the heap of fur there lay a gunny-sack filled with something and tied with a deerskin thong. The sack Musgrave next proceeded to open. He stared at its contents. It was filled with marten and fisher skins. Such a catch of fur for one man in a single Winter was extraordinary. But still his precious fox-skin Musgrave could not find.

There now remained only the bed of the sick man to examine. Once again Musgrave spoke to him.

"Jimmy Weeks," he said, "I must hunt through your blankets now. Shift!" He laid his hand, not too lightly, on his shoulder as he spoke. The man squirmed from beneath it as though a knife had been put into him, while the pain in his face aged it by years.

Musgrave paused.

"Are you going to give up the pelt?" he asked.

Then Weeks gave in and raised his knees.

"Put your hands under two thicknesses of blankets, beneath my legs," he said.

Musgrave did so and drew his fox-skin out!

And so he recovered his fortune in the end.

He spread the precious skin on the brush before him and gloated over it, then turned to Weeks again.

"Now," said he, "I'll take my ten marten-skins." He did so, picking out the best. Wrapping them up in the gunny-sack that had contained the fur, he picked up the rifle and revolver and turned to leave the tent, while Weeks watched him without a word. In the act of pulling aside the tent door Musgrave turned to the sick man:

"I'm going to leave you now. I don't suppose you are really very sick. A belly-ache ain't nothin'—nothin' leastways to what I've been through, thanks to you. I ain't goin' to steal your guns—I ain't no thief. But I can't leave 'em with you. You might make a sneak to the door an' shoot me in the back. I ain't takin' no chances now; see? I'll put 'em where you'll find 'em, on the bank o' the river, likely at the place I camped last night. Good day to you, Mr. Jimmy Weeks."

He nodded curtly and strode away.

The sick man lay still and silent, staring at the canvas roof. Occasionally, as before, he moistened his lips with his tongue.

CHAPTER IX

HER WORDS

THE dogs had returned to the tent when Musgrave came out of it. They sat side by side in the snow and glanced at him as he passed. He spoke to them and the big one looked across the white reaches of the lake and whined softly, but the smaller one merely cocked his head and looked straight before him in the impersonal way of dogs, while he shifted his feet. They recognized his having fed them, so were tolerant, not openly hostile.

When Musgrave reached his sleigh he packed his furs carefully away, but the rifle and revolver he thrust beneath a lashing of the load, upon the outside of it. Swinging his dogs into line he spoke to them and started back along the trail. At his previous night's camp he left the rifle in a conspicuous place, leaning against the trunk of a spruce, while the revolver he hung above it by the trigger-guard from a branch. Then, filling and lighting his pipe, he hurried on again.

In those latitudes, at that season of the year, near the end of March, the sun daily showed above the horizon for about three hours. But it had not yet risen, though the golden splendor, deepening in the east, showed that it would not be long ere it lightened that white world.

For the past two days the weather had been wonderfully fine. Musgrave glanced overhead and noticed how the stars were paling, but there was no vestige of a cloud in the illimitable blue. The morning was cold and wonderfully still; the beaten snow of the trail creaked beneath his snow-shoes. He thought of the man he had left behind him in the little tent and of how he had been cheated out of his just satisfaction, and ground his teeth. The thought of the man's sickness did not trouble him at all just then.

A pain in the stomach was but a little thing; painful while it lasted, of course, but nothing to worry about. He was a miserable little brute, and frightened, that was all. Then the thought that he had succeeded in what he had undertaken was very pleasing to him. For a time it banished others from his mind. His success meant so much to him. It meant his happiness and Marie's happiness. A day or two

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before, the idea of having to return to her and acknowledge failure had maddened him. And so his thoughts turned again to Marie and his eyes grew kinder.

In a few more days he would be with her again. He thought of how he would hold her in his arms and kiss her dear lips; of how they would sit together again in the little parlor, as Madame called it, beside the big stove, he with his arm about her waist, her head upon his shoulder.

Then the recollection of her last words came to his mind. He could recall word for word what she had said to him, and of a sudden his face grew grave. He remembered how she had warned him of his strength. Well, he had not used that strength of his. But it was the recollection of those last words of hers that had touched his eyes with gravity: "He ees wicked," she had said. "Give him a chance to repent, forgive him and the *Bon Dieu* will forgive you!"

Had he given that weak little man a chance to repent? Yet Marie had asked him to do so. Did he not love his girl well enough, then, to do the first thing of any moment she had ever asked of him? He knit his brows and his pace slackened. "Jimmy Weeks—Tod." He repeated the ridiculous names to himself. Somehow they fitted the gray-haired little man, with his weak, amiable smile, as names have a knack of doing. His very ailment had a suggestion of absurdity about it. A stomach-ache! Children had such pains. He, too, had had them as a child. Still he had not done what Marie had asked him to do; there was no getting away from that.

It was one of the very first things, too, that she had asked of him. Would it have been so hard for him, he asked himself, merely to forgive as he hoped to be forgiven in the time to come? It is weak natures alone that harbor hate. Then, too, forgiveness is such a fine investment after all, with the chance of a magnificent return, and he had missed that chance.

Marie would certainly hear about it some day, he knew. What would she think of his conduct? He had left the man alone in his tent, sick. He told himself that it was nothing. But was it nothing? He did not know. The man might die. "Pshaw!" he laughed. He was a fool to trouble his head about him. He whistled a gay air, and for a quarter of a mile he marched and would not allow himself to think of the sick thief.

The day was brightening in the east, the sun was rising. Some spruce upon a hilltop to the westward were tipped with brilliance which crept lower on the trees, lower, lower, till all their tops seemed bathed in flame. The stars had all gone out. The sky was an inverted bowl overflowing with light which yet left the woods dark upon the river-banks, and had not touched the snow.

Meanwhile the tall Scot swung along at his top speed and for a time thought of his girl, and love, and happiness, and of the dear home that would be theirs. But he found out, that morning, that thought is not always easily managed, nor conscience stilled. Jimmy Weeks! Before he was aware of it he was thinking again of the polite, weak little man, and of how he had left him alone in the tent—perhaps to die! Yes, he might die! Men have a trick of dying occasionally. The thought would obtrude itself upon his mind to nag at him. Then what would Marie say?

He told himself that she could never hear of it. But he felt she would. News that makes for one's unhappiness one always hears, he knew. He continued on another hundred paces or so.

"The man may die," seemed ever humming in his ears.

From far away, among the gloomy trees, a sound grew, slowly, awfully. It swelled in volume, to die away lingeringly, complainingly. It was a savage, eery note that told of blood and hopelessness and death.

Again the thought harassed his mind, "The man may die!" That man he had left alone and sick, might die! Then what would Marie say?

Once more he heard the death-song of the running wolves, and stopped his dogs. He seated himself upon his load, and taking his pipe from his pocket lighted it and smoked. Again he heard the wolves, but fainter in the distance. The glory in the east was deepening, brightening. "The man may die!"

"Forgive him and the *Bon Dieu* will forgive you," Marie had told him, and he had never yet learned to doubt Marie.

He stood up and laughed a little. The bright sun rose above the trees and in a flood of sudden light he turned his dogs. He called himself a fool. He told himself he did not care the value of a rabbit-skin

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about the man, but he was only doing it for his girl, for Marie's sake!

CHAPTER X

IN THE TENT OF JIMMY WEEKS

MUSGRAVE had journeyed some eight miles down the river when he turned his dogs. About two hours later he stood once more before the little tent-door, undoing its fastenings. The two dogs sprang forward, barking savagely at the sight of him and his team.

When Musgrave arrived at the tent he thought that there must be some one with the little man, for he was talking. Then he heard him laugh, and then there was a pause. A moment later he began again to talk, a wandering, inconsequent babble of words and broken sentences about his earlier life and the boys. He bragged, too, a little of his cleverness in trapping Musgrave of a sudden realized that his mind was wandering. He undid the fastenings and stepped inside.

Jimmy Weeks still lay upon his back as Musgrave had left him, but his hands now lay upon the outside of the rabbit-skin blanket: On Musgrave's entrance Weeks looked at him and smiled with silly amiability. He began moving his hands about in a queer, aimless fashion that seemed to accentuate his helplessness.

Musgrave moved over to the stove and put some wood into it, Weeks meanwhile watching him with haggard, kindly eyes. Then Musgrave, taking a seat beside him on the brush, began to talk to him, but Weeks paid no attention. A minute or two later he began talking about some woman.

"He's sure been waitin' fer you tur'ble long, dear, an' that ain't no idle dream. He ain't over an' above rich, Tod ain't, but he's got a tur'ble big heart, his old mother used to say, an' he's prayed fer you, too, night an' mornin' steady, li'l girl, true, s'lp me. Poor li'l girl! But he won't wait must longer, Tod won't, he's that lonesome without his li'l Mary.'

Musgrave glanced sharply at him as the name passed his lips. So Jimmy Weeks, too, loved a Mary. He felt more kindly disposed toward the little thief, and thanked God and his girl for turning him. His honest Scottish nature would not assume the credit solely.

The little man began singing in a weak, quavering voice:

"Thar's a grave in the shade o' the Rockies,
Thar's a sigh in the hum o' the bee,
Thar's a moan in the flow o' the river
For the tender an' constant Marie."

"Sure thar's a grave; li'l Mary's grave. But don't you worry a mite, li'l girl, Tod's a-comin', comin' on the keen jump, you betcha! He ain't loiterin' none now."

He put his two hands to his eyes and began crying like a child.

Musgrave put his hand upon the little man's head. He spoke with difficulty, for there was a queer lump in his throat:

"Don't cry, Tod, old man. Little Mary sent me to you, she did, Tod; so help me God she did! You're all right now."

He felt as though he were talking to a child, and again he thanked his God that he had obeyed Marie. The little man had grown strangely quiet at the touch of his hand. He was not crying now, but smiling his silly, amiable smile. Then he began to sing again:

"She's gone to her home o'er the Rockies,
An' the tamarack points to the skies;
'Twas a wild bird that whispered the tale, dear,
Which it l'arned from the tears in her eyes."

"Yes, she's sure gone to her home in the skies. That's heaven, you know; that's whar Tod's li'l Mary is. She's a angel now. Think o' it—a beautiful shinin' angel, a-singin' to beat ten o' a kind, with a harp, happy as ken be. Ain't it wonderful!"

And so he babbled on about the woman he loved, while Musgrave held the roughened, toil-worn hand in his and told him how another Mary had turned him back again. At times his talking seemed to quiet the sick man, when he would lie very still, with his foolishly amiable smile. Through the long hours Musgrave sat beside him, and, if he were tending a loved brother, he could not have been more kind and patient. In the evening he fed the dogs, which had grown a little accustomed to one another.

THE time dragged wearily while the sick man talked and talked. Occasionally he varied it by singing the same song. Twice during the night, for an hour or so, he slept. But Musgrave never closed his eyes, lest he might sleep

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when needed. Early the following morning Weeks regained possession of his faculties and made a sane remark.

"I thought you had gone," he said.

The words, though distinct, were scarce above a whisper.

Musgrave looked at him and nodded.

"I did go," he replied, "but I came back again."

For a little time there was silence, while the man's free hand moved feebly, restlessly over the blankets.

"What time is it?" he suddenly inquired, and was told. A moment later he moaned a little, and Musgrave asked him if he was still in pain.

He moved his head very slightly and whispered, "Yes."

For five minutes, perhaps, he lay silent with closed eyes, till the man watching by his side thought he had fallen asleep again. At length he opened his eyes.

"Is the dogs fed?" he inquired, and Musgrave nodded.

"Them's two tur'ble good dogs." His voice seemed to have grown stronger. "Flip —that's the little one, you know—is tur'ble game. Big one's Grizzly. He's a good one, too. Tur'ble kind, both of 'em." He closed his eyes once more and was silent for a little time. Then he spoke again,

"Friend," he said, "I'm dyin'."

"No, Tod, you mustn't worry! You'll be right again soon."

Musgrave had felt, ever since his return, that the little man was dying, but to have it put thus plainly by the man himself was strangely shocking.

The little man shook his head and smiled. A curious pathos had crept into that foolish smile of his.

"I ain't worryin' none, friend. I would have if you hadn't come back, but since you're here I seem to be kind o' slippin' off tur'ble easy an' comfortable. Pain's kind o' eased off, too. But I want to tell you, friend, I'm desp'rate sorry I rustled that thar pelt o' y'urs an' give you all that trouble. I'm sure tur'ble sorry about that, an' I'll be real obliged if you'll forgive me, if you ken see your way clear to it."

"'Course I forgive you, Tod, old man."

The dying man looked at him.

"You're sure white!" he said.

Again there was a silence between them. Musgrave moved over to the stove and stirred the fire up, putting more wood upon it, then he resumed his place by the dying man, who began talking again.

"I'm sure tur'ble glad you come, friend, tur'ble glad, 'cause I can make up, some, for what I went an' done to you. Thar's me fur, a right smart pile o' it, too. It's all yours, friend. I give it to you real cheerful. I sure appreciate y'ur kindness. . . ."

"But, Tod," Musgrave interrupted, "I don't want your——"

Weeks raised a feeble hand, and Musgrave was silent.

"I ain't much time. Listen," he said, "the fur's yours. I sure can't pack it with me. An' me traps. Thar's ten mile o' them, about four to the mile. You'll find me line, all blazed, half a mile no'th. The dogs, too, is yours; Flip an' Grizzly, tur'ble good dogs, real kind. Tent, guns, everything's yours, ev'ry blame thing. You've b'en real kind to me. I'm gettin' tur'ble tired—tur'ble—tur'ble tired. Yes I'm a-comin', Mary. . . Sure thing. Tod's a-comin'—comin' on the keen jump, li'l girl. . . ."

He gave a long sigh and Musgrave heard a queer sound in his throat. Then there was silence, for Tod had gone to his "li'l girl."

CHAPTER XI

P'TITE MARIE

MUSGRAVE camped near the little man's tent that night. Early in the afternoon he fed his five dogs, and made friends to some extent with Flip and Grizzly.

The two days that followed were very busy ones for Musgrave, for during that time he visited Weeks's line of traps and lifted every one of them. There were thirty-nine in all, while caught in them were five fine marten, three fisher, an otter and a lynx.

The next day he packed the dead man on his own sleigh, for he was determined to bring him to Fort Providence.

When he did ultimately reach the Post and tell his story, the dour-faced Scot, with many nods and a preternatural gravity, remarked,

"Hech, mon, but sair greetin's nae gude the noo," or words to that effect. He then plunged into an anecdote of his hero, "Sandy McPhail, meenister of the kirk at hame."

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When Musgrave showed him the furs which Tod had given to him he gave a long whistle and remarked,

"Eh mon, but the gude Lord rewardeth His servant. Blessed be the name o' the Lord." The greater part of the evening he entertained Musgrave by wailing the most mournful of hymn-tunes to the accompaniment of a concertina, an instrument upon which he played indifferently well.

Two days afterward, somewhat late in the evening, Musgrave, with quite twelve hundred dollars' worth of fur, besides his recovered thousand-dollar fox-skin, swung at a rattling pace up to the door of old Joe Bouchet's little house.

Before he had time to unharness the dogs the kitchen-door opened and Joe himself appeared. He held his pipe in his hand. Musgrave stripped the harness from one team, while old Bouchet approached, peering in the gloom. He did not at first recognize his visitor. Musgrave straightened himself and stood in silence, tugging at the ice caked on his mustache. He held out his hand and laughed a little.

"*Bon jour, mon père. Comment vous portez-vous?*"

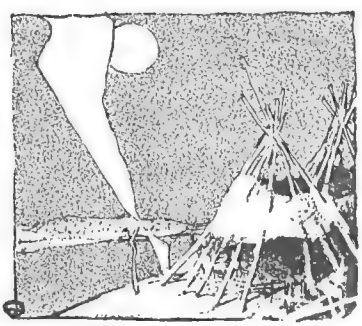
Then Bouchet recognized him. He struck his hands together and leaped into the air.

"*Nom d'un chien!* Ees dat you, Red? *Sacré Tonneur!* but I am glad to see you. How are you, *mon garçon?*" The two men shook hands. "Marie she shump seex arpents when she see you!"

Of a sudden he wheeled about, and, placing a hand to his bearded lips, he roared,

"Marie!"

The door flew open and, with a laughing cry of happiness, Marie appeared! And then! . . . Then Musgrave held her in his arms again, and heard again the rapturous murmur of her laughter!



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

WHEN you read "The Taming of Sarson" those of you who know the Philippines will understand that C. M. Cosby is writing from first-hand knowledge. Here's a scrap from one of his letters:

One of the principal incidents in "The Taming of Sarson" was suggested to me while serving as an enlisted man in Company K, Third Battalion of Engineers; or rather, while "absent without leave" from that outfit. Another young soldier and I had elected to join the column under General Woods in its hike up the Taraca—which is a long story in itself.

It sufficeth to say that while we were searching for loot in a cotta that should have been deserted by all the rules of evidence and war, a Moro holding a naked knife in his hand appeared suddenly at my friend's elbow. Naturally the owner of the elbow was startled and the sudden tightening of nerve and muscle lent speed to his hand. I heard the bump of the blow where I was pottering about on the other side of a nipa shack. The Moro didn't so much as scratch my companion, but he (the Moro) ruined a perfectly good gun.

THAT was the germ of an idea that gave rise to "The Taming of Sarson." The "local color" I gathered during the eighteen months that I spent on the island of Mindanao. Part of the time we were merely a detachment quartered in a worm-eaten stockade that three companies of infantry deserted by order because their sentries were being cut up too fast; and once the Moros tried to entice us into the open by setting fire to the corral. In this respect we had the bulge on the infantry in that they, because of their numbers, had been compelled to sleep in tents in the open.

The Moro, though not a cowardly person—to give the devil his due—is not likely to attack armed soldiers by the light of day unless he is *juramentado*, but he realizes that gun-users are at a disadvantage in the night-time and is quick to take advantage of the fact.

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IT HAPPENS that at this writing Frank Houghton is staying at my house, down from Montreal for a few days in New York, his first visit, by the way, to the American metropolis, though he knows our West thoroughly enough. And I've been hearing some interesting things about the Canadian wilderness. Here's a line from a former letter of Mr. Houghton's concerning his "Red Musgrave's Luck" in this number:

I have drawn a little map, from memory, on the first page of the MS. to help a little. If you want local color you will find it in this story. I have spent about thirteen years in the Northern bush with the Indians. I was also about the same time ranching, cow-punching, etc., etc., in the Canadian Northwest.

If your readers want stories of the Northern wilderness I think "Red Musgrave's Luck" should please them as it is certainly true to the life. Ye Gods! I know the life.

HERBERT C. TEST gives us the following little incident that lies somewhere back of his "Ferguson Adventures:"

My adventures have been more generally what we might term "adventures with adventurers," most of whom I have met during years of boarding-house life. I am grinning now over one incident which caused me some embarrassment when it occurred.

It was in my early days as a newspaper reporter and I occupied a room in a small boarding-house alongside a quiet, unassuming fellow who seemed to us to be specially created for our amusement. A dozen of us in the first flush of youth selected him as special target for our dinner-table boastings. I blush yet when I think of the wild tales of adventure by day and by night with which we regaled him. We were the nifty little liars when it came to recounting our various exploits. We told of our prowess in street and saloon fights; boasted of the princely amounts of our various pay-checks; offered to take him out and show him the town, and generally made asses of ourselves. Perhaps some of us can be recognized in my story. He seemed delighted to be in the company of such heroes and kept coming back for more.

One day I was assigned—with a real reporter—to cover a story of a big rumpus that had occurred on one of the biggest engineering jobs in the city. When we arrived there I was ordered to hunt up the heroic engineer in charge who had licked a dozen husky Italian laborers in the scrimmage to save the life of one of his assistants. It was my fellow boarder, of course. Afterward we discovered that he was an ex-member of the United States Engineer Corps, graduated from West Point; that he had traveled all over the world in charge of immense and difficult engineering jobs, and was known in far-off corners of the earth as one of the most venturesome and bravest of adventurers. He told me afterward that he never enjoyed anything so much as our yarns. They stopped, by the way.

AS I knew Mr. Bushnell by correspondence, naturally the following letter came as a jolt, somewhat lessened by the second letter from Mr. Curtiss. There hasn't been time for a reply to my letter sent at once to Mr. Bushnell himself.

IT OCCURS to me that your readers may be interested in hearing from one whose pleasure it was to meet a true adventurer in his last days, more especially as in the April number appeared a communication from him in "Camp-Fire." I refer to L. Bushnell, a young Canadian soldier of fortune. Had many an interesting chat with this extremely likable young fellow while visiting Cananea, Sonora, Mexico, a few weeks since. He had had many a stirring adventure by land and sea in his short life of about twenty-seven years, in various parts of the world. I think, however, that he took more satisfaction in serving the peons of Mexico with Francisco Madero than in any other event of his life. When I left Cananea a battle was imminent between the soldiers of Huerta and the troops of the State of Sonora, and I presume Bushnell could not resist the appeal of the latter to serve their machine-gun, at which he was an expert, although he had said to me "never again." He was killed in the first day's fighting. *Adios, mi amigo!*

C. R. CURTISS.

REFERRING to mine of a recent date. Just saw a man from Cananea who informs me that Bushnell was not killed—seriously wounded and now able to be about. Guess you can only forward him my letter under the circumstances. Yours,

C. R. CURTISS.

Two or three days after the above were received I found this letter from Mr. Bushnell in my mail. But it is written before the battle.

WELL, we sure are having a fine time here now with all the fighting going on around us.

I wish to know if I can make an arrangement with you whereby I may have my mail addressed in care of your office, as I am going to take the field in a couple of days with the Constitutionalists as Captain and naturally can not have mail sent here. If you can do this for me you will oblige me very much. Cananea is in our hands now and practically all border ports. We are sending out a detachment to take Naco from the Federals.

It will be safe to send one more letter here and after that no more, so please let me know whether you can do this for me.—L. BUSHNELL.

DON'T by any chance read the following letter from Nevil G. Henshaw until you've read "The Trail of the Silver Promise," his story in this issue. Otherwise you'll spoil your own enjoyment of the tale. So turn back to it right now if you've not already read it.

"The Trail of the Silver Promise" is, of course, wholly fiction in so far as the plot and characters

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are concerned, but the idea is based upon a reality. The old French and Spanish buried many coins with their dead to pay the passage across the Styx, and this has given rise to many reports of the finding of treasure buried by Lafitte. In fact the woodland across from my home in New Iberia, La., was full of holes dug by treasure-seekers—a very unfortunate circumstance for ourselves, as we lost several head of stock that had fallen into them and broken their legs.

I REALLY believe that I got the idea from an incident that occurred at Orange Island, the home of the late Joseph Jefferson. Mr. Jefferson had several Spanish coins that had been found upon his place and, fired by the idea of getting rich quickly, his son Willie and myself determined to investigate the matter. We were very young but very much in earnest, and, having located the old graveyard one afternoon, we went to work with an assortment of picks and shovels that we had smuggled out of the stables. We chose a likely spot and dug down until we hit something hard. I am convinced now that it was a live-oak root, but at the time we thought it a coffin, and coincident with our striking it a genuine Louisiana Norther blew up, with its accompaniment of thunder and lightning. We heard one big crash, and then the wind hit us, and after that it was a free-for-all to the house, in which I think I won by something like a hundred yards.

I may add that we never went back, and that they are probably still looking for the hand that stole the tools from the stable. This constitutes my one adventure in the realm of buried treasure.

FRANK BLIGHTON is busy preparing for the "greatest adventure in the world," but found time to send me the following by way of introduction to the Camp-Fire:

When I tell you that I am usually a timid, shrinking violet, seeking only to shed forth my fragrance from a mossy dell, and scorning the busy hives of men, you will throw a fit. So, when you have partially recovered, and for fear you will print something worse about me, I will now prove that I am the original, sweet-scented violet that I hereby aver myself to be.

Had it not been for a hired girl who remembered our little blossom when the house was on fire, Frank Blighton would never have written the "Super Third Degree" but would have excarnated in a pillar of fire arising from the burning house. His father, from whom he inherits his tendency to get into situations which are not always what he would like to have them, was a little-known character, but quite a potent one, in the late unpleasantness of '61. Blighton, senior, was one of a company of men who worked in and about the Springfield armory at Springfield, Mass., when Abe Lincoln was elected. Hearing rumors that Abe would never live to be seated as president, a company of adventurers financed themselves to uniforms, rifles, etc., and took an oath that Abe *would* be inaugurated. When the famous Sixth Massachusetts went through Baltimore, Blighton's father was in the scrap, and at the first and second battles of Bull Run. On account of bad teeth he was dismissed from the service, but permitted to enlist in a regiment of New York engineers, and he was the man who turned up the shot and shell which the *Monitor* hurled at the *Merrimac* in the decisive naval battle of the Civil War.

From his mother, who was a state normal school teacher, Blighton inherited the taste for writing which afterward led him into odd places. The hired girl saved Frank while his father, then a machinist in a big harvester works, was saving his mother and baby brother.

FRANK'S first adventures started on the banks of the Erie Canal. He fished it, fell into it, and in the Winter time slid down its banks. He became a printer's devil in Nebraska, played in a band, learned to curve a baseball, and when he was not hoboing as a tourist printer, he was playing with circus bands, minstrel ditto, or pitching in various bush leagues. He became a reporter on a country paper, then editor, then studied law, medicine, and allied sciences of bacteriology, microscopy, etc., and was also a court reporter. Has worked in every capacity from police reporter to news editor on papers across the United States, from New York to Seattle, and from Minneapolis to El Paso, Texas. In the infancy stage of wireless, he helped equip an oyster schooner with wireless apparatus, and reported the yacht race between *Shamrock II* and *Columbia*, in 1901, getting the reputation of the most able wireless pirate in the world and making a very nice stake.

Drifting west on a lecture-tour, after selling goods on the road, booking lyceum talent, he landed in Seattle in time to be sent for to become news editor of the San Francisco *Globe*, during the famous Ruef trial; was in the thick of the assassination of Heney, the suicide of Haas, and the drowning of Chief Biggy and a string of minor tragedies around the Pacific Coast metropolis.

AT THE request of a friend he went to Arizona, where he edited two papers. At the inception of the statehood struggle, Blighton started a paper in Tucson, Arizona, on $95 advance subscriptions and his enthusiasm. He ran it for eighteen months, during which he was arrested twenty-one times, indicted fifteen, tried six, put up $73,000 bail to stay on the street to report the constitutional convention, for which, in advance of the election of the members, he and his associate editor printed an entire constitution in an edition of tens of thousands of newspapers, while Blighton was in jail for eight days. It is a fact that of twenty-seven demands which were termed anarchistic and socialistic when that advance-constitution was sent hurtling across Arizona, twenty-four are now in the State constitution of the last State to enter the Union, and United States Senators and Governor Hunt certify to the efficacy of the man behind the gun.

Blighton sold his paper for $160 to a man whom he owed $158.50 and, after getting a job as an expert stenographer reporting a Congressional investigation, went back to his California home when the last nine indictments were dismissed against him in Arizona, then got interested in aviation and tried to kill three goats with a biplane in Buffalo. He still specializes in aviation but passes up the goats. He began writing for magazines in July last, and when not figuring how to get the Gordon

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Bennett cup for aviators back to America, hammers out stories and attends dinners of the Adventurers' Club.

I FIND that I have grown to a sunflower at this point. But, really, I would like to pay a tribute to Jack Crone, the fighting boilermaker of Tucson, who led the march of the machinists, boilermakers, car-whackers, sheet-metal men, pipe-fitters, and other shopmen in July, 1910, when they marched down the main street of Tucson after I had been arrested for trying to kill eight men who were trying to finish me, led on by a man who had been a Rough Rider in the Spanish-American war. The judge was not going to discharge me. When the men came into the courtroom, and began thrusting out their hands over the rail and calling my name, and gave one yell, the court thought better of it, and as they broke down the bar of justice, he left with the complaining witness—whose seven accomplices had already told the truth—when they saw the unwashed railway men march down.

It is the only instance in the country that I ever heard of, of workingmen marching to rescue a newspaperman from injustice, and losing a half-day's pay by so doing. These were the same men who bought the *Voice of the People* plant at Phœnix, and financed the making of the State. They were led by Jack Crone, 155 pounds, all steel, and the grittiest, gamest man who ever pulled on a shoe in Arizona. The railroad canned him for this and for running around getting me bondsmen. He still lives there.

EDGAR WALLACE, who tells us the story "Arachi the Borrower," is, as you may recall, a very well-known English journalist and war-correspondent with a good deal of African experience behind him. He tells the following:

I was in the heart of a Congo forest. My little camp was about twelve hundred miles from civilization and about three hundred from the nearest Belgian port. I was therefore a little perturbed when there arrived in the middle of the night a naked native messenger, bearing a message which he carried in the cleft end of a stick.

I carried the yellow paper to the fire and opened it, wondering whether it was an urgent instruction to get to safety—there had been a little unpleasantness between two tribes in my neighborhood which had ended in some blood-letting, and there was a forest rumor that I had been singled out for an early and untimely end.

I opened the letter—it was dated Boma, twelve hundred miles away, and was from Richard Harding Davis. The great American journalist was going through the country and had sent me a message of congratulation on a recently published novel of mine.

DURING the late Felix Diaz revolution you will recall from the newspaper despatches that John Kenneth Turner was placed under arrest by the Felix Diaz party in Mexico City for what they considered undue prominence during those troublous times. A serial by Mr. Turner begins in this issue—"The Little Yellow Men," and, since it deals with the Japanese invasion of our Pacific Coast, is of particular interest in connection with California's and the Federal Government's problems and perplexities arising over the question of land ownership by "those not eligible to citizenship."

Incidentally, Mr. Turner knows Fred V. Williams, who wrote "The Cost of the Battle-Lust," saw him during the hostilities, and has an intimate knowledge of the Lower California campaign:

My most recent Mexican experience rather tops anything I have gone through with before. A part of it, a minor fraction, though as much as I could cram into one magazine article, appeared in the Semi-Monthly Magazine Section (in New York printed with the *Sun*).

If I could write you any adventure matter for the "Camp-Fire" I would do so, but the best of it seems very tame to me now. I had some daily newspaper experience in ——, working for anything from nothing to twelve dollars a week. Yes, I *did* get eighteen for a while, but it was not for long. And there was the ten to twenty a month we could make on sending dispatches to the San Francisco dailies. —— really has—or had, rather—an extremely picturesque Chinatown. I spent a good deal of time over there. I was always "in" on the police raids, which came about so often to teach the heathen that it is always good business to pay promptly and the right ones.

THERE came a time when, for quite a period, there were no raids. Being young and foolish and a little bit idealistic, I started a newspaper campaign against the gamblers and, necessarily, the police. The Chief, who was growing very rich on $100 a month, replied through the newspapers that his intentions were good, etc., but that it was simply impossible to get the evidence. "The Chinamen know the police," he said. "Now if there is any reputable citizen who wishes to prove the thing for himself, I will be glad to swear him in as a special officer. I'll give him a star. The city will offer a reward of $10 for every arrest and conviction. Come ahead, good people, etc., etc."

Well, there were reputable citizens who tried, but they all failed, for the reason that the moment a man became a special officer some one tipped it off and he couldn't get into the "joints." By disguising myself as a tramp I succeeded. With a billy-club in my hand I drove a squad of gamblers to the street and there, with a mob of chattering, gesticulating Chinese about me, I expended my breath on a police whistle. No policeman came. But I held on to three of my prisoners until I found one of them and compelled him to take them off my hands. I had taken a hobo chap along with me for a witness. The police ran him out of town and several frame-ups were sprung on me, but the jury decided to believe me and I got my $30, which was a fortune to me in those days.

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Out of the affair grew a police investigation which shook up the whole force. The Chief bought a farm and retired to it, being succeeded by another fellow who only *wanted* a farm. It was at about this time that General Homer Lea, the brains of the late Chinese revolution (the military end of it), was organizing his ill-fated "Chinese Imperial Army." I have never seen a more picturesque banquet gathering, nor partaken of a finer supper, than on a night soon after the organization of the —— company. I and another reporter were guests with the American officers and teachers of this movement.

THE color of my story, both as regards Little Asia and the packing-houses, is a faithful reproduction, as I remember it, and the plot is not so impossible, or even improbable, as some might think. In its original form I had a hard time selling the story—I suppose because it was at first overloaded with argument, and also because there still are so few Americans who don't believe that we can whip the world with both hands tied behind our backs and with gout in each of our pedal extremities.

I have no doubt Mr. Turner had difficulty in selling this story of his. As he says, most Americans firmly believe they can whip any other nation on earth simply because they're Americans, and they don't relish stories that show us even temporarily at the mercy of a foreign foe.

I WONDER *why* most Americans think we can whip anybody? Because our regular army is a mere handful compared to those of other first- or second-class nations? Because our navy has the Canal, Alaska, our Island possessions, and three long and largely undefended seacoasts to protect? Because modern wars are sudden, sharp and short and mean victory to the nation that is well prepared and defeat and humiliation to the nation that trusts to getting ready after fighting has begun?

It's one thing to advocate peace, but quite another to say we're ready to fight when we're not.

All of which, of course, has to do with the discussion proposed in last month's issue—Are our army and navy all right or do they need improvement? And now we'll get back to John Kenneth Turner and his "Little Yellow Men" with a word from Sinclair Lewis, associate editor of ADVENTURE:

Grant Wallace, war correspondent in the Russo-Jap war, experienced with Japs through special study in California, cow-puncher, New York *Evening Sun* reporter, artist, etc., used to sit up till one or two o'clock—at my special request!—in my shack in the foothills of the San Francisquito Mountains, telling me of what Japan will do to the United States in war. We could hear the great breakers roar into Carmel Bay. In the bay next to it—the splendid waters of Monterey Harbor, which is a regular docking-place for fair-sized steamers—Wallace used to declare, the whole Japanese army could be landed in transports in twenty-four hours. The bay is absolutely unprotected and the only post on it is the Presidio of Monterey, with a small force of infantry and cavalry and not one single coast-defense gun. Monterey Harbor gives easy access to San Francisco and to the San Joaquin Valley, etc.

Wallace has studied the Jap soldier in action, for he was one of the few correspondents who were really out with the army. When he returned to the United States after the Russo-Jap war, he was in charge of a big eucalyptus plantation and used to watch the Jap coolies, who did all the rough work, lining up and marching out with their spades and hoes in a way which showed them to be trained soldiers. It is impossible not to spot them as soldiers—a point which Mr. Turner has made in "Little Yellow Men."

THEN he used to watch their crafty methods of getting into the United States. By paying enough they can perform this operation as follows: They land in Mexico, get tickets for Canada with which—despite the Asiatic Exclusion Act—they would be permitted to pass through the United States. Jap after Jap has he seen dropping off at stations in California with the major part of a ticket to Canada cheerfully unused. At this time, three years ago, probably long before "The Little Yellow Men" was written, Grant made prophecies which almost exactly ditto the prophecies of Mr. Turner in the story, as to the large number of Japanese soldiers who are coming and will come to California, well officered and trained; the ease of investing California clear to the Sierra Nevadas and fortifying the passes; and their desire to do so.

It may not be true, but I understand that West Point has been familiar with the idea of an attack by the Japs for years and that there have been many lectures given there preparing the budding officers for the campaign.

So recently as January 17, 1913, General Rafael Reyes, former President of Colombia, arrived in this country and made public through the New York *American* the following statement regarding the necessity of fortifying the Panama Canal against Japan:

"Fortify the canal immediately and as best you can. Now that America has ended the stupendous task of joining the waters of the Pacific to those of the Atlantic she must not stop until she has made the canal safe against the attack *that is certain to come. I mean that Japan will cause trouble in that portion of the continent before long*, and the only way for the United States to offset such an attack is to fortify the canal—both by coast and land defenses—and make it impregnable."

LYMAN BRYSON, who has a story in this issue, went from the University of Michigan to newspaper work on the Omaha *Bee* and other papers. Many of you will recognize the anecdote told in the following letter:

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"At Dutchy's" is a more or less true account of an incident that happened a generation ago in Wyoming. It was told to me by a man now occupying a high position on the bench in Nebraska. His early days were spent among the scenes of outlawry and confusion that make the aura of romance over the "West." He came to Nebraska shortly after the war and enjoyed first hand the things that made life interesting. His career was stormy and picturesque, but after trying almost everything else he took up the law, was elected to the bench and is an exceedingly mild-voiced and gentle-mannered old man.

His early days as a lawyer were not surrounded by the conservative and metropolitan dignity that grace them now. He was an attorney in Omaha when the famous cowboy-shooting case was tried in the Douglas County court-house. I have forgotten the name of the cowboy, but the story goes that he was accused and arrested on the charge of shooting at a brakeman riding by on the top of a freight-train. The cowboy's defense was just this: It was absurd to suppose that he had shot at a brakeman going by on the train, because the brakeman was there alive to prove that he didn't. If he had shot at him the brakeman would not have been there. In other words, he couldn't miss. The judge and jury were a little incredulous, but the cowboy took them all out in the yard of the old court-house (now being torn down) and at their pleasure picked off the leaves from the trees and nickels from the air, and so forth. He was so amazingly expert with his shooting-irons that he was acquitted. The jury believed that he could never have shot at a man and missed him.

You can see my habits. When I start out to tell my own adventures I find myself very quickly telling the adventures of some one else.

RAN away some thirty years ago from a stuffy London law-office to Canada —Georgian Bay, Lake Nipissing, logging, hunting, lumber-piling, foreman, superintendent, paymaster, a dozen years in the Middle West, a dozen on the Pacific Coast, a fruit-ranch at the foot of the Wasatch Mountains — George Frederick Stratton, whose "Watch Me!" appears in this issue and whose stories are already known to you.

OF SWEDISH parentage. Born in Copenhagen, Denmark. Then Halmstad, Sweden, and Brooklyn, U. S. A. Then some of the experiences in the letter that follows. Then some adventures as a hobo and with a circus; newspaper work and politics; now for some years city editor of the *Daily Republic*, Rockford, Ill. Charles C. Lofquest, whom you've met before.

My father came to America alone as an immigrant, without knowledge of the English language, without a soul he knew and with just eighty cents in his pocket when he walked out of Castle Garden into the Battery. After he made enough to send for us—there were four of us—we started for America.

My first adventure was falling into a pond in the Tivoli Gardens in Halmstad and being fished out by a burly *polisbetjent*, which is Swedish for "copper." My second adventure was sitting on the rail of the Thingvalla liner on which we crossed from Christiania and nearly falling into the Big Drink.

As a boy I played on the streets of Brooklyn—we lived in Brooklyn always, my parents still living there—and New York whenever I could get any of the gang to cross Brooklyn Bridge with me. And I used to look in at Steve Brodie's on the Bowery, and see the gloves that Sullivan used up Kilrain with, and the signed pictures of all the high-hatted, gallant old sluggers. And I remember when I first started school I couldn't speak enough English, and Miss Somebody couldn't understand me—and I was dreadfully thick. But I soon learned the tricks of the big city boy. We used to poke around down the river-front and talk with groggy old sailors who had sailed the Seven Seas, and we fished eels off the docks while the sailors talked. I guess maybe that's how I got to write stories, although I know Scott's "Ivanhoe" gave me the writing itch.

MY THIRD adventure happened when I was about seventeen. Three of us, including "Cock-Eyed" Post, had driven grocery wagons Saturdays until we had enough money to buy a sloop-rigged catboat which we properly baptized the *Matteawan*. And we sailed that leaky flat-bottomed pretense of a boat around the roily, narrow channels of Sheepshead Bay, in front of Manhattan Beach—they tell me it's closed now—Brighton Beach and Coney. One April morning we sailed forth to fish for fluke. We kept sailing and sailing with a fierce breeze lifting the *Matteawan* along the way Hamburg used to run when Tod Sloan sat on its neck and whispered in its ear. We got out so far that the low sand-dunes along Manhattan became a mere line on the horizon, and then something happened. The wind hit our mainsail a poke, and foolish "Cock-Eye" had tied the sheet to the boom. *Bing!* Over we went in a flash, and I know I turned somersaults going down in the briny. I came up under the sail and clutched a rope and clung. For three hours we hung like rats to that sail with the majestic rollers sweeping their wash over us. Then three Italians happened along and took us off—and I've always loved the Latin people since.

My visit to South America followed the next year. I had the young fellow's trick of disappearing from home during the Summer—and turning up miles away from home. That Summer I went to Buenos Ayres to look around, and to this day my parents do not know where I was. "Oh, Charlie's off tramping somewhere," used to be their explanation of my absence. In Argentine I saw the *gauchos* from the southern coast settlements—and I have always remembered them. After some time on the Plata I came back.

HE WAS only nineteen in 1907 but in that year Arthur D. Howden Smith went to Macedonia on a wandering commission for the New York *Evening Post*,

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decided to join one of the revolutionary *chetas* as a private, and served in active irregular warfare against the Turks. That was five years before the recent war. Those of you who were reading ADVENTURE last year will remember "Fighting the Turks in Macedonia," Mr. Smith's articles in the January, February and March, 1912, issues, giving his own experiences. In the May, 1913, number was Mr. Smith's article on "The Adventurer-King: Czar Nicholas of Montenegro," and in the present issue is "The Prisoner," a fiction story woven about a Turk and his Bulgarian captor in the war of this past Winter. He has to his credit, also, two books—"Fighting the Turks in the Balkans," published by G. P. Putnam's Sons, and "The Wastrel," published by Duffield & Co., and there are more tales of his in our safe.

The following is the story of how Mr. Smith made his way back to Bulgaria and safety at the end of his exciting experiences in guerrilla warfare. The Mileff *cheta* was to disperse temporarily, to avoid Turkish reprisals for the fight before Bukovo. For a month or two there would be no more fighting, and every additional man meant additional danger of detection. Nicola, the courier, and a small *cheta* from Drama were carrying despatches to Sofia and the American was to accompany them across the frontier.

What follows opens at an inn on the way. Note carefully Tzveta Bojova. Before long we'll be having a serial story laid in the Balkans with a heroine of the same stamp as that woman patriot and I don't want you thinking that such a character is merely a creation of the author's fancy.

AS WE reached the gallery, a shaft of light fell from a half-opened door, and with it came a voice unlike any I had heard in Macedonia, the voice of a woman of culture.

For a moment, as we stepped through the doorway, the bulk of Nicola's big figure over-shadowing the room, and blinded by the flickering oil-lamps, I could make out nothing distinctly. Then my eyes fell upon a woman standing by the primitive mantel-piece and staring with polite curiosity at me. She wore a long black skirt of rough texture that had evidently out-lasted much hard-usage and a blouse of some coarse material that yet managed to reveal traces of refinement. She could not have been more than twenty-five, if that, and although privation and toil had seared little lines in her face and about her deep-set eyes, she was quite pretty in a strangely delicate way.

"*Bon soir, Monsieur Smeet,*" she said, smiling frankly, with one hand extended.

It was not her knowledge of my name that surprised me. Americans did not march with the *chetas* (bands of revolutionary soldiers) every campaign of the revolution. But that she should speak French—and with such a pure accent!

"Are you a missionary?" I asked her.

She smiled, showing rows of even white teeth.

"I am Tzveta Bojova," she said simply.

Then I knew. You who have read of Joan of Arc and, perhaps, smiling over the story, dismissed it as a beautiful legend, a fable to inspirit men, you have never heard of Tzveta Bojova, who was known as "Madame" to the peasants and *chetniks* (revolutionary soldiers) of a vast sweep of wild country in northeastern Macedonia.

SHE was born in a little village in the Macedonian province of Seres, and after she was graduated from the University of Sofia, where she had studied medicine, she married a man who was the school-teacher in her old home. Several months afterward the *askares* (Turkish regulars) descended upon the village and burned her father's and her husband's houses, killing them both, together with two of her brothers and some of the women and children. Two others of her brothers helped her to escape, and traveling night and day by the hidden *chetnik* trails, succeeded in getting her safely across the line into Bulgaria.

But she refused to stay in Bulgaria where she was safe. She did not indulge in any hysterical dreams. She knew that a woman could not be of so much use as a fighter as she could be in a more feminine capacity. So she offered her services to the Committee in Sofia as a doctor and nurse. They accepted her services with alacrity, for if there was anything Macedonia needed it was adequate medical facilities. This was particularly true during the revolution, and when I met her she had been nearly three years at the work. Her sex never made things easier for her. In fact, the physical frailties correlative to it were an added burden, but she was never known to give in, and she positively did not know fear.

IT HAS always seemed strange to me that the terribly wearing life she had lived had not told more on her appearance. She was still young and pretty. Her hair was a russet-brown color that caught the lights and shifted to a bronze hue. Her face was very pleasant, with broad, strongly-marked features, and her smile, which came often, was always heartening. She could smile sometimes when a man could not. I have never met the man or woman who was her equal in pluck. There was a quality about her, indefinable in nature, that made her striking, even in that untidy room, dressed as she was in garments ragged, ill-fitting and not over-clean.

With her was an escort of three medical undergraduates of the University of Sofia, strapping young fellows dressed in the fluted white petticoats of the mountain peasants. They joined our circle about the fire and we sat until late into the night exchanging experiences. I asked Madame, as she was called, how she withstood the hardships of her life.

She smiled deprecatingly, but I insisted that it was hard on me, at any rate, and at this she burst into frank laughter. "*Mais moi, aussi,*" she admitted merrily. "No, it is not easy always, Monsieur

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Smeet. But what would you? The work is to be done. And I have done it for three years, and I am still here."

"But the Turks?" I suggested. "How do you keep out of their hands?"

"Ah, the Turks!" she said, laughing more gaily than ever. "Bad men! They would catch me and kill me, if they could. They chase me, always. When they approach a village, heidi! I take to *le Balkan*. Then I hide and the *askares* go away."

"But if they should catch you?" I knew the *askares'* ways with women.

A shadow crossed her face and her lips tightened.

"This." One hand touched her hip where nestled the butt of a revolver perhaps half the size of the big Nagonts the *chetniks* carried, but just as deadly. "*Aussi*——" She drew a phial from an inside pocket and shook it gently in the light of the lamp.

For a space we said nothing, gazing into the fire; but with her merry laugh that I soon found to be one of her most pleasant characteristics, she threw off the despondency and turned to me again.

"Have you a cigarette, Monsieur Smeet?"

Having been equipped with pouch and paper, she sat cross-legged in the fire-light and rolled herself a cigarette, which she smoked before saying good night and rolling up in her cloak between two of her escort. The fact that she was sleeping in the same room with five men did not seem to bother her in the slightest degree.

SHORTLY after supper the following night the *chetniks* from Drama arrived, six of them, and after giving them a couple of hours' rest—for they had been on the march three days—we set out on the first lap of our journey to the frontier. When Madame stood up to go down-stairs into the court-yard where the main party awaited us, I saw her for the first time in her *chetnik* uniform. She was clothed exactly as we were in a brown suit, faded by rain and weather, with knickerbockers met at the knee by thick golf-stockings, and a hooded water-proof cape. She looked even more tiny and small than before. It seemed impossible that she would be able to stand the terrible pace we must maintain to dodge the Turkish frontier patrols. But I was to learn much of woman's endurance before I saw the last of her.

It was morning before we halted, and in truth we were not sorry to push on without resting, for the weather had turned suddenly chilly. At noon we had a frugal lunch, for the food supply was limited, and took up our route, swinging in a wide half-circle through a mostly unsettled country, with our objective Granitza, the same Bulgarian-Turkish village which we had boxed in entering Macedonia's debatable land. We were all light-hearted as we swung along, singing the *chetnik* songs and thinking of the warm welcome we would receive from the friends on the opposite side of the line.

THE trail wound around mountain-spurs and over stretches of moorland sometimes under cultivation, but we never met a living soul, although several times we passed houses. At last the trail left the moors and climbed upward. At six o'clock we stopped on a mountain-top for supper, eating our last fragments of food. It was growing very cold, and we did not stop any longer than we had to, particularly as one of the Drama *chetniks* had developed chills and fever so badly that he could not sit on either of the two pack-horses we had with us.

Some time after seven o'clock we reached the summit of that mountain on which I had stood weeks before, listening to the popping of Mausers in the Vale of Rhodope below and wondering whether after all a *chetnik's* life was worth sampling. In a cleft of the mountains on the opposite side of the valley the lights of Granitza glinted through the fast-falling dusk. But Granitza was far away and the night was yet young. We must wait another hour before attempting to slip through the frontier patrol. Ordinarily the rest would have been welcome, but that night the cold turned inaction into agony. A frost had spread over the trees and grass, and the wind that swept unopposed across mountain and moor searched us to the bone with a keen, biting insistence.

I THINK we were all glad when it came time to start, stumbling as quietly as possible down the trailless mountain-side. About ten o'clock we reached a glade at the foot, in which we waited while the grand patrol passed on its rounds; and after the clash of arms had died away in the night, we slipped across a moonlit field, dreading our own shadows, fearfully eying the strange shapes that were evoked by the moon on every side of our hurrying line. At last we reached the forest-clad slopes of the frontier mountains, and breathed sighs of relief at sight of the welcome cover.

Now our task was to cross the frontier in a wide circle, aiming to set our course outside the fringe of guards that surrounded Granitza and then swing around toward the village, once we were safe on the Bulgarian side of the line. For three hours we toiled over the narrow trails through the woods that stretched for miles along the mountains' flanks, and at the end of that time we knew that we must have achieved our objective. But imagine our chagrin and disappointment when Nicola, who was our guide and who was supposed to know every foot of the frontier region, suddenly admitted that he had lost the trail.

It was dangerous to proceed, for we might lose our sense of direction, strike back across the frontier and blunder into the arms of the *askares*, who were known to be sweeping down toward the frontier in a wide-flung net that was intended to gather up all the *chetas* and remnants of *chetas* left in that part of the country since the fight of Bukovo and either crush them or fling them across the line into Bulgarian territory. So we halted in a clearing, while Nicola cast around like a hound at fault and tried to pick up the Logina trail, leading back through the hills to the village which had been the rendezvous of the *cheta*. We had wandered so far off the course to Granitza that he altogether gave up the hope of making that village.

BY THIS time it was colder than ever, and even plucky little Madame Bojovo began to shiver, although she kept insisting that it was *nay studaino* (not cold) and making flippant remarks about the comfort of the "Hotel Balkan." It was nearly morning before Nicola picked up the lost trail, and to get to it we had to follow a whimsical path that twisted along the line of the frontier, now in Macedonia and now in Bulgaria. The cold increased persistently; already the mountain torrents were frozen over. Finally, to add to our

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troubles, the horses began to give out. Every now and then one of them would fall heels over head with a force that set the forest aisles ringing. Once, too, Madame and I lost the rest of the party and wandered about for half an hour in the bewilderment of isolation.

Just as the east was reddening with the dawn we stumbled into a pasture that we knew must be in civilized Bulgaria by the hay-stacks that dotted its length. Some of us burrowed into the stacks and pulled the hay around our shivering bodies, and some of us built fires of it; we all made some use of it, and I suppose if the good farmer who owned it had witnessed our depredations he would have been mightily wroth. But as a matter of fact we let him off easily. We were so cold that we would readily have burned his house had we been unable to get a fire by any other means.

From this pasture the Logina trail ran straight and distinct along the sides of the pass, and we resumed our march with the comforting knowledge that there was nothing but the necessary physical exertion between us and our destination. Occasionally we came to log-huts, at the doors of which stood groups of men who eyed us curiously and gave hearty greetings if they were Christians or looked curses if they were Pomaks. About eleven we reached the lumber-camp of Spass Arizonoff, where we had rested on our march into Macedonia, and here we had a hearty meal of hot milk and white bread—the first white bread we had had in weeks. How delicious it tasted!

LOGINA was now only a matter of twenty miles away, and it seemed to us as if it must be around every corner of the unending pass. But the tremendous strain we had been under began to tell. Our stamina had gone; we had had no adequate rest for two days; and within two hours after leaving the camp of the lumber-jacks we were worn out completely. After that I really do not remember what happened. I simply tramped on, pulling up one foot after another, dumbly realizing that it was necessary to walk if I would reach Logina and a comfortable bed.

The marvelous kaleidoscope of a Bulgarian highroad passed us all but unnoticed—Pomaks in their gaudy costumes; lumbering ox-wains; stray foresters, with the royal lion on their caps; cavalcades of horsemen; strings of pack-ponies; goods-caravans, reeking with all the colors and odors of Asia. At sunset Madame and I found ourselves on the summit of a hill, from which we could see in the dim distance a curl of blue smoke that was Logina. Madame's feet were hurting her, and she took off her sandals, marching through the dust in her stockings. She had deep black circles under her eyes, and cheerfully admitted, when she was pressed, that she was *molcho bullilee* (a little tired).

But presently we came to a level highroad that was lined with telegraph-poles, and a gendarme at the roadside—he was very imposing in his great-coat, sword and revolver—stepped out and jabbered something frantically, and Madame turned to me with a little laugh that was half a sob.

"We are, indeed, in civilization, *mon ami*," she said. "He tells us that it is against the law for you to carry arms on the prince's highroad. You must leave your rifle at the farm-house here."

The gendarme winked mysteriously and ejaculated another string of gutturals.

"It will be all right," continued Madame candidly. "He says this house is the revolutionary depot for this district. Your weapons will be taken care of."

So I gave up the rifle that had been my good friend for all those past weeks, and bidding good-by to the kindly gendarme, we tramped on through the gathering darkness toward Logina. It seemed as if the lights were still miles away, when we found ourselves in a little street, with people passing and repassing continuously. Turning a blind corner, we were confronted by a ditch, and, of course, I nearly plunged in. In front of us to the right was a wall, and in the wall a gateway—the entrance to the Hotel Makedonia.

OUR journey was ended. We had marched the entire sixty miles from Kovatchavishta in forty-two hours. My *chetnik* life was over. We all knew it, even Madame Bojova. She turned to me in the courtyard, as the villagers clustered around our battered little party, chattering, exclaiming, asking for news of this one or that, rivaling babel in their clamor for news.

I could not hear her, and she took my arm and led me toward the gateway where we could see in the distance the towering masses of the Rhodope ranges. She pointed to them.

"For you," she said, "it is over. But for me—for us—it is always."

I have often wondered if it were.

ON PAGE 2 will be found our Lost Trails department. Quite a few items have been dropped since last month, the "lost trail" having been found. Some of those remaining have a long hunt before them, but the department has already proved its efficacy. Have you any old comrade or missing relative you'd like to get track of?

APPLICATIONS continue to come in for the identification-cards. A brief explanation of them is given below for the benefit of those who may be unfamiliar with this plan for rendering a free service to all readers of the "Camp-Fire." Last month we published some of the letters from real adventurers heartily endorsing the idea as extremely practical and useful. There follow reproductions of both sides of one of the cards, actual size. The serial number will be printed across the face in a different-colored ink. Cards are now ready for delivery.

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. Letters will be forwarded to friend unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later ar-

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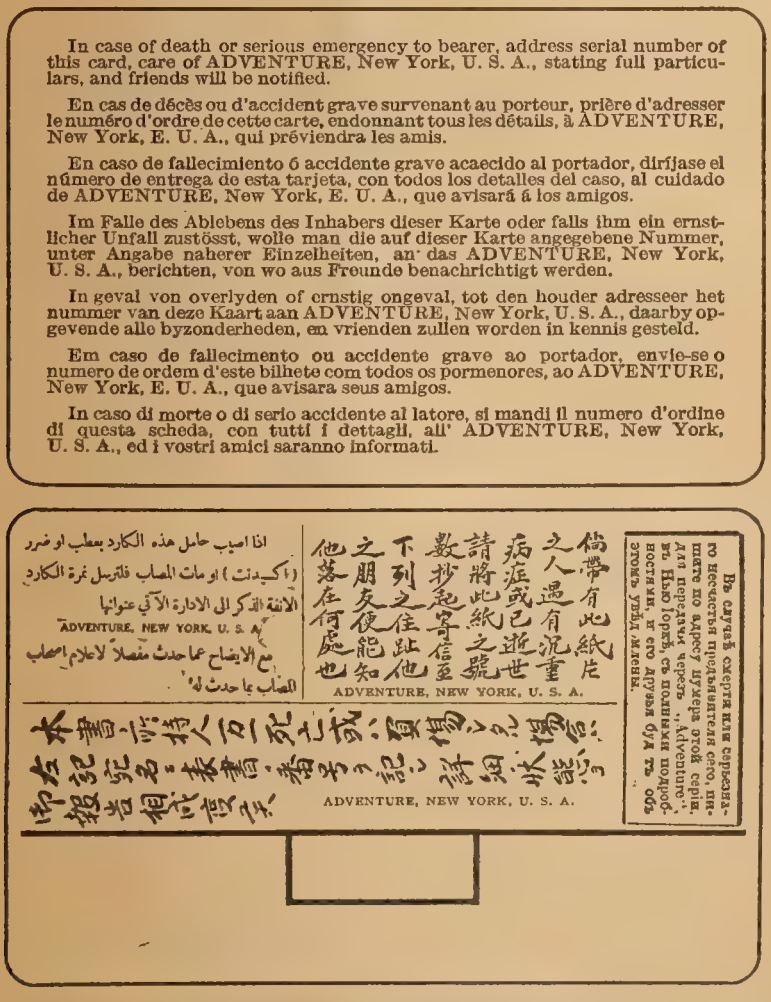
rangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*


In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified.
En cas de décès ou d'accident grave survenant au porteur, prière d'adresser le numéro d'ordre de cette carte, endonnant tous les détails, à ADVENTURE, New York, E. U. A., qui préviendra les amis.
En caso de fallecimiento ó accidente grave acaecido al portador, diríjase el número de entrega de esta tarjeta, con todos los detalles del caso, al cuidado de ADVENTURE, New York, E. U. A., que avisará á los amigos.
Im Falle des Ablebens des Inhabers dieser Karte oder falls ihm ein ernstlicher Unfall zustösst, wolle man die auf dieser Karte angegebene Nummer, unter Angabe naherer Einzelheiten, an das ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., berichten, von wo aus Freunde benachrichtigt werden.
In geval von overlyden of ernstig ongeval, tot den houder adresseer het nummer van deze Kaart aan ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., daarby opgevende alle byzonderheden, en vrienden zullen worden in kennis gesteld.
Em caso de fallecimento ou accidente grave ao portador, envie-se o numero de ordem d'este bilhete com todos os pormenores, ao ADVENTURE, New York, E. U. A., que avisara seus amigos.
In caso di morte o di serio accidente al latore, si mandi il numero d'ordine di questa scheda, con tutti i dettagli, all' ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., ed i vostri amici saranno informati.
ADVENTURE, NEW YORK, U. S. A.
ADVENTURE, NEW YORK, U. S. A.

You will notice that a blank space has been left wherein the bearer can write the directions in any other language he pleases, in case he finds himself where none of the above are understood. But I think you'll agree that the ones used will pretty well carry a man all over the globe. They are, in order, English, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Portuguese and Italian on one side; on the other, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese underneath. The selection was made only after careful consultation with several dozen world-wanderers with plenty of experience on which to base their judgments. The serial number will be on both sides.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

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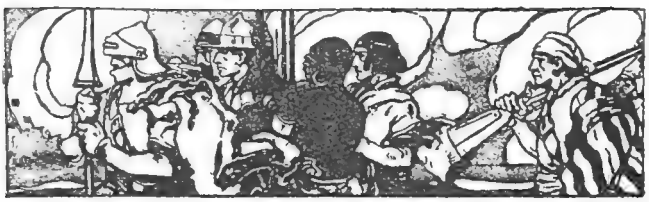

WANTED —MEN *and* ADVENTURES

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the Camp-Fire, free of charge, to such of our readers as may care to avail themselves of it. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or part of a letter. Any inquiry for adventures or adventurers sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor.

HAVE honorable discharge from U. S. Navy (two enlistments); served in Mexico under Madero in 1910-11. U. S. Secret Service two years (highly recommended). Worked for Kawanee Tea Co., in Tokio, Japan. Have been in South America and up to Alaska. I am forty-one years old. Can you use me?—Address No. 61.

I AM working in an automobile repair-shop and hardly making expenses. I would like to have a job out on a ranch away from town where I couldn't spend my money. I have worked on a farm up until about two months ago, when I came here. Am 6 feet tall, light complexion, light hair, weigh 165 pounds. Can do any kind of work that any ordinary man can do. Am nineteen years old. —Address E. D. DONOHO, care of J. M. Young, Caraways Auto & Supply Co., South Travis St., Sherman, Tex.

YOU will remember Mr. Horan's two former letters concerning his finding what looked to him like an old Spanish mine sealed up with a peculiarly hard concrete; also that he makes an offer to the right kind of partner and backer. An archeologist friend of mine, with only the letters to judge by, ventured the opinion that Mr. Horan might have mistaken a natural formation for concrete. I know no more than you do about the matter, but somehow don't agree at all with my archeologist friend. Particularly after reading the following letter from Mr. Horan, who seems to be an old hand at the mining game and not at all likely to go wrong on that point:

I do not think nature would dig a shaft in solid rock and then fill it in again with broken-up rock and at the same time make a trail leading up to the shaft through a thicket; also dig a tunnel and then fill it up with rocks cemented together and then cut marks all around those old mounds and besides make the mounds themselves. It doesn't seem likely. I was very careful in going over the whole thing before I ever formed an opinion about it, and while I have not the slightest idea as to what the proposition would pan out to be worth, yet I believe, as it would only require a small amount of money to handle the proposition, it would pay to investigate. It is possible it might not be worth anything and it is also possible it might be worth a fortune. . . . . .

I'd just like to get some man of standing who has business ability and friends of influence and show him around over that country. I prospected over a good portion of it and I found some mighty good prospects, but did not have the money to do anything. There was one copper prospect there; I picked best ore and it ran 39.6 per cent. copper. Then there is a coal prospect just about 200 yards from the railroad that is as fine a grade of coal as I ever saw. . . .—Address J. HORAN, 1319 Dart Street, Houston, Texas.

MY PLAN, briefly, is a motorcycle tour, more comprehensive than ever heretofore undertaken and with many original features that may cause some few ripples of surprise. Everything will be clean, honest, open and above-board, and I can furnish unimpeachable references to any one who may now or hereafter be placed in touch with me through the Camp-Fire or otherwise. I want a strong, healthy, honest, clean-minded and clean-hearted boy for the trip. He will be well cared for, make some money and have the time of his life, but he must have nerve and be willing to "stick" for several years; some fame and possible fortune await him. He must be an American or American-born of foreign parents, an orphan or so situated that an unconditional consent to his going will be given by his parents or guardian after I have satisfied them of the legitimacy of the venture. He must be very young at the start—not over fifteen, unless exceptionally small for age.

I am a traveler, a newspaper reporter, editor and publisher in the past, a proof-reader at present and a homeless wanderer.—Addresss No. 56.

AM AT present an enlisted man in the Navy, yeoman first class, a clerical man by profession, either mercantile or general all-around office man, but at heart a wanderer and at present looking for a good long adventure that will promise to

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be well seasoned with excitement. Am twenty-three years of age but have wandered around the United States for the past six years. My enlistment terminated May 10th, and I do not intend to reenlist, as I can not find enough in the line of excitement to hold me, and if you can but give me the address of some expedition going out (to any part of the world), it will be highly appreciated.—Address No. 57.

SEVERAL months ago, at the last minute, I took two letters out of the "Camp-Fire" because they dealt rather vaguely with a proposed expedition that had too much the appearance of filibustering. The following letter shows the expedition to be of another nature, but with equal appeal to the adventurous:

THE expedition will consist of not more than fifty men, armed with only Winchesters (one to each man allowed by the Governments for self-protection), sailing from New Orleans, cleared for Colon, where we will pick up some friends of mine who will come down the Pacific side. After leaving Colon our destination will be the city of Panama (R. R. across); then by ship to Mollendo (Peru), thence by rail to Puno on Lake Titicaca, and finally Cuzco.

Obtaining mules and supplies here, we will proceed to a spot designated by my backers, where we will file on a large number of quartz-bearing claims which, worked singly, would not be profitable, but if worked in wholesale would turn out well. The men will receive $2,000 each for their mining rights and will act as guards and agents for the forwarding of supplies, machinery, etc., for a short time.

After insuring the men in this way against going home without at least a small stake, I intend to send them out in squads of six to make a systematic search for an Inca treasure-house. Although I have good reason to believe that I have accurate information as to this treasure, I also know that others have been disappointed and so will first guard against failure by taking the plain business proposition first.

The men must bind themselves to sell their mining rights for the sum mentioned and to turn over to me one-fourth of all treasure found.

The only change that may be made will be that if most of the men are coming from the Western States the starting-point will be San Francisco instead of New Orleans.—Address Cliff Sands, care Mrs. J. S. Sands, 826 East 56th St., Seattle, Wash.

I DON'T quite understand why the writer of the following wishes to run a notice in this department, since he thinks it will do no good. Nor do I quite follow him when he says that those who want men for adventures will find them, but that those who want adventures won't. The first can't happen without the second's happening too. And if he'll look back through the several numbers of this still very young department of our Camp-Fire, he'll find quite a few little chances for excitement. Here's hoping he may be agreeably surprised and connect with something that will please him to the core. And here's good luck to him!

But I don't want any one to get the idea that this department guarantees to get every man what he wants. Far from it. There will probably always be more men seeking adventures than there are opportunities for them. That is to be expected. And some men are better fitted than others for the various opportunities that arise, and are more likely to be chosen. Some may not be really well fitted for any real adventure.

With all that, this "Wanted" department has nothing to do. It doesn't pretend to promise anything or guarantee anything. Except to be of what service it can to you of the Camp-Fire. Many men want adventures; many adventures want men. This department is offered to help them get into touch with each other and then arrange matters between themselvse.

It is open to any one with a legitimate "want." I have turned down one or two because they seemed quite out of the field of adventure. One, as you know, I barred because it seemed to intend things contrary to law, and, finding it did not, publish it in this issue. I'll have to ask for a free hand in passing on such questions, but remember that what I want is to do all I can for you. Yet the real "doings," of course, will be among yourselves, with this department serving as your clearing-house. It is, roughly speaking, open to any one; but it is you, not I, who must decide whether a man or an adventure is what you want. The service of the department ends when the man or adventure has been brought to your attention.

I AM interested in your new column of men and adventures wanted, but have no faith of its doing any good to those who seek excitement, though no doubt those who want men will find them. . . . . I wouldn't object to the paragraph below being printed, under a number, in the new column.

A young fellow of twenty-four desires to go somewhere and do something, travel or not, financial profit no object. Would like to go on any exploring or scientific expedition or surveying party. Has good sensible knowledge of practical navigation and would be no greenhorn on a vessel. Is an enthusiastic nature student and may be of some use in a natural history expedition. Would go on any expedition even just as general campman, for the sake of going. What is desired chiefly is an out-of-door life, preferably, and work that will bring me in contact with natural objects and growing things. Also

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if there is any kindred spirit who has a vessel not too large for two to handle, and has enough confidence to go anywhere, I will make a proposition—excitement and uncertainty promised but not financial profit, though it may be made to yield some financial return.—Address No. 64.

A RED-BLOODED young man looking for anything that may spell "Adventure." Has been a U. S. N. sailor (honorable discharge), reporter, private detective, mechanic, drug-clerk, salesman and athletic coach. Can furnish good A 1 reference by naval officers and private parties. Good shot with rifle or revolver; understands larger guns to some extent. Strong, healthy and fit for all climates or conditions. Ready any time, for anything, at any place that means business.—Address OTTO P. H. HAGENAH.

IF YOU can put me in touch with about five good men who will go with me to work some good placer ground I found in Peru, I will feel obliged to you, as good men are scarce who would not be always fighting booze. This placer ground is the richest I ever saw. I washed out ½ kilo gold in one day's work. I would go shares with the men, as it is a mean country—Cashibo Indians and head-hunters mostly. If these men will stay with me, they will get wealthy. I would go to Iquitos and then up the Ucayali to a place about one month's travel by canoe. It has no name yet. Then about fifty miles west across the Pampa Sacramento. I did not denounce the claims, as no fellow, not even the Government, knows about it. I do not know how much gold there is, but I think we should make about $200,000 out of the ground I worked. I was awful sick with fever and had to leave quick, being pestered considerable by Cashibos. I had only a couple of cholos with me and could put up no fight at all. This time I would make the party about twenty men in two canoes and then we could stand them off.

Men going from New York would have to furnish their own arms, but I will pay all passages to Iquitos, deducting same later on. I do not want to scare parties looking for adventures, because I must have good white men and no bums or beach-combers, but this will be a hard lay-out, you bet, and we will all make money.

I am no quitter. I was born and raised in Arkansas, am forty-one years old and was fifteen years placer-mining in California and Sonora and other places. I was in two revolutions in Ecuador and was in some fights in Venezuela quite a while back. I am six feet two in my stocking-feet and am a hard man to handle in a fight. Am putting all the money I have left in this trip. I know the kind of men I want. I would have to see them first. I could pick up bums, but thought you could print something about this in your magazine and then maybe some strong young fellows—they must be single men—would hear about it. I will not be ready till July or August. Am going to see a man in Albany who has been in that country and wants to go. I would like to get four others.—Address Jack Tate, care H. Hone, 610 Lexington Avenue, New York City.

ANXIOUS to join some kind of expedition where there will be great risks and great gains if successful. Have a university education; traveled extensively in the United States; have good knowledge and some experience in military operations secured in the U. S. Army, Field Artillery division. Also have had wide and varied experience in the industries of the country and can turn my hand to almost anything.—Address No. 59.

I AM twenty-five years old, height 5 ft. 10 in., weight 160. Strong and rugged. Never sick in my life. Born in southwestern Colorado, and early in life learned to ride and shoot fairly well. I rode line until I was twenty, then came back East. I passed through the big shake in San Francisco and was one of the first to be tagged "refugee" and sent East. I also passed through part of the last flood. I was tied up in Meadville, Pa., and barely escaped. Now what I want to know is this: Is there any party fitting out for anywhere that needs the services of a good camp cook and handyman, wages no object? If there is I would be glad to go.—Address H. EDGAR KING, 259 11th St., Milwaukee, Wis.

UPON leaving school I took a course in the flying and construction of aeroplanes at one of the leading schools in America. Last Summer I did some flying, but spent most of my time on the road with one of the best flyers in America. We did a great deal of over-water flying and this convinced me that there is a great future for the flying-boat in the little-known parts of the country. I have a plan for next Winter and am looking for a man who likes adventure with a big A. I intend to start at the mouth of the Nile and by means of that river and the Congo cross Africa by flying-boat. I am intending to spend the entire Summer this year in practise on the flying-boat and preparing myself for the trip. I will furnish complete flying-boat, but the man I take must have some capital, because I wish him to be a real "pard" and one who can help me with the book I intend to publish on my return. I will be glad to hear from any one who would like to go.—Address EARLE F. BEERS, 3 Lamont Place, Rochester, N. Y.

I'M GETTING ready to roam again and I need one to three good men who'll enjoy going on daring courses (as No. 6 has it). They need only invest $300 to $600 each and share the very large profits of each cruise. I can show 'em things that few other men ever saw—in some cases ever heard of—as to adventures. Oh, on my cruises we always use that as pepper and salt on our food—plenty of it. How I enjoy myself with the Finny Folks—some of 'em are rather large—like hammerhead sharks, etc. I get lots of fun taking a small boat and one hand to pull, and roping sharks, prodding whales to wake 'em up; to get fine pictures of 'em—going some.

I've half a dozen big (and little) exploring expeditions in hand. Each one of them should suit any man who wants to roam (and live out of a tin-can—maybe). I can promise 'em plenty of real adventures. As to profits, well, they'll range from 50c to $10,000, depending. I've a few cargoes in mind that I want to go after. A few of 'em are: Pearl-beds and reefs not been worked yet; a golden idol, $1,500 reward (good yarn on this Indian idol, too); place where the natives step down and pan out all the gold dust they need, to trade; I used to see 'em come in with a few ounces each; plenty much there yet!

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Then there're some more idols in a city I found once while collecting in tropical forests. Also I happen to know of two treasure islands; a friend of mine got some "gold trace" beads from the pirates' (?) caves there on the islands. He was there after rare birds and was afraid the crew of the schooner (ten men) would fix him if he came aboard with the treasure. It's there yet.

ALSO I want to take a moving-picture outfit and go to a certain bay where the sea-serpents "grow big." Was pearling and trading there and used to hear and see 'em playing around like whales. Oh, yes, they're there yet. A friend there wrote me that they come in the bay now more than they did those days. A man somehow doesn't feel like eating or sleeping aboard ship after meeting one of those "things." By the way, I need twenty-five or more 20- to 25-foot octopuses. The fun of getting 'em without them getting us should help to liven up any one going with me. Oh, yes, I want these pets alive. Also I need some moving-pictures of whales fighting, standing on their tails, almost out of the water. I happen to know just where to go to get this $2,000 set of pictures.

Then there're some rare wild places and one dozen rivers and a bit of coast—say about 20,000 miles—that I wish to explore and write up. After these cruises are over I've a lecture cruise in mind that should be of interest (and pay $100 to $200 per lecture).

I never felt like hunting either Pole, for I always make my ice at sea or ashore, any place, whenever I need it. The Indians out on the desert showed me how to live a week on a handful of food, but I'd rather have real "squares" like my old China steward used to turn out for us on the yacht.

AS TO myself. I'm known in many parts of the world as the "Ocean Hunter." My business was and is to go and get 'em for museums, etc. Get pictures or drawings; the wild things that crawl or swim in the wide deep waters of the tropical (and arctic) world. Anything from a rare, tiny bug to a sea-serpent I'll book as an order. I seldom fail to get what I go after—for I'd be there yet unless I *did* get 'em.

Once I had thirty-two Jap divers, men and women, getting out abatone shells. Again I traded on and about Tiburon Island in Gulf of California. I recall one cruise there when we found the head, one foot and hands of a Mexican pearler, fastened to one-half of his burned boat (tender to his pearl sloop). I take it they ate him and set up the boat and these ornaments as warning to others. Yes, the tales of Tiburon have not been told yet right. There were times I recall when to be left on the island meant to be burned and eaten. Maybe I'll write you some tales of "Trading on Tiburon" some day when I feel like it.

Up north I traded on the east coasts of Siberia, getting skins and fossil (tusk) ivory. I know where there's a big bed of it. It's about two miles long. Should be about $20,000. But I've not hit any icy seas. Sealing and trading in Bering Strait and up under the Circle sounds nice from down here, but up there it's Hell frozen.

I used to cruise and pearl-trade and get queer cargoes out South Sea way. I know of fine picking there yet—also in the coral sea, East Indies, and dozens of other places I could name. I go "whaling" in some 20- to 30-foot fast speed-boats now and then—to get action-pictures, etc. Indian trading kept me going a few years back—five trips here in U. S. and a dozen down south.

I've made a study of the sea-serpents, devil-fish and other friends of mine. I've collected thousands of relics, tons of shells, etc. "Shell," "Bones," money, skulls at $7 per! Curios without end. I've been in many lines of business afloat and ashore. Have published three good books; have notes for four large ones; written dozens of nature and travel articles. Am only man who has ever raised *pearls* (same as peas) in California. Can't get colors up here; must go to a certain place in West Indies where conditions are right. I used to be an aeroplane crank and know most of the "big ones" out this way. I was going to China with General Homer Lea; I've one of the last letters he ever wrote. I know Jack London. Many other odd ones all over.

WILL you send me addresses of any likely men? They must be able to invest $300 up in vessel and outfits; "brokes" won't go along with me! Please send me No. 6's address; also No. 7 (I've a cruise to suit his tastes!). Also address of No. 9; also No. 12 (sure), No. 13, and letters or addresses of any man or men that you think would serve. The right man (or men) can stay on the job for years if we hit it up right. *No boozers wanted.*

I offer somebody the chance of a life-time, for nowadays it's few fellows who get a chance on a line of business that pays (as mine would) $5000 to $10,000 yearly and traveling all over on land and sea. I've yet to hear of any place but what I could find some sort of a paying cargo of curios, etc.

My advance order-book shows these orders to be filled: Twenty-five large devil-fish, $1000 (only three men in U. S. who know how to prepare 'em); certain kind of skins, $1500, to just one firm. Can reach two thousand firms in same line; two rare turtles, $400 each (not $4); moving-pictures, to value of $2000; forty barrels of certain species of shells; 35,000 of two other kinds of shells; one hundred barrels certain forms of corals; original nature-photos of many sorts—standing offers of $25 each.

I do not mention the hundreds of smaller orders for thousands of things like butterflies at $5 each, etc. We even have shells in California waters that sell for $16 *each;* are rare.

I READ your tropical cruise and could take you back there in the same general course and show you all kinds of adventures. I may have a vessel in those waters inside of eight months; of course I'll expect you to take a cruise with us! When I get down there I wish to write a few for our club magazine—*National Geographic Magazine.* (I'm a member of the National Geographic Society; also the American Society of Curio Collectors, Collectors' Union, and others.)

I've dashed off this letter in a rush and really intended to have a steno. type it, but she's busy and will be for some days. So I trust you'll pardon me for sending you this scrawl! And you a busy editor! Oh, yes, I've been there too. Published a newspaper once. Never again!

I've been sick three years. Appendicitis three times. Lungs once. Am nervous as a cat, but at sea feel better.

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I hereby apply for a good seat around the Camp-Fire. Keep the fire going, for, if I get started, we sit round it all night yarning. Many is the long night I've kept 'em out of bed, telling true tales of the long ago. I've had fifty years' experiences, though am but twenty-nine past.

Here's hoping you and I get to know each other better!

(Hastily) Yours for more adventures!

Capt. W. L. WHITE, Gardena, Cal.

BORN in Finland and have been in most every corner of the earth. Have been in every seaport in Europe. Whaling in the arctic; pearling in the South Sea islands. Filibustering around Cuba and South America. Have sailed under most every flag but Japanese; shipwrecked three times, once in Gulf of Lion in Mediterranean, once in Bay of Biscay, once in the North Sea. Three years in the American Navy during the Spanish War. Can handle rifle, revolver or large caliber guns. Would like to hear from some one. Address R. W. TRIGG, 310 McKinney Ave., Houston, Tex.

AM LOOKING for a position with a traveling party that makes this dull life worth living—well-to-do people who need the services of a traveling-manager, secretary, interpreter, guide, attentive steward, wireless operator and, last not least, fairly good cook; a tall (6 ft.) healthy man of thirty-four, unmarried, who speaks fluently six languages, viz.: English, German, French, Italian, Polish and Russian. Served in the Austrian army as volunteer one year, knows every corner of Europe and was for a number of years foreign correspondent in great commercial enterprises both in Europe and U. S. Open for employment Sept. 15.—Address No. 58.

LIKE to work and am an efficient mechanic, with a wide experience for a boy of twenty-one years. It is my one desire to visit Africa or any foreign country before I pass in my chips. 5 ft. 6 in. in height, weigh 125 lbs., and in perfect health. Excellent companion; exponent of outdoor life and physical culture. White and an American. References. No money to speak of either. Now if you know somebody bound out and who wants a nervy, trustworthy companion, please refer them to me.—Address No. 60.

AM OPEN for anything that promises some excitement, regardless of the nature or whereabouts, providing it is within the law. Am twenty-eight years of age, single, of one of the best families in the South, and a civil engineer. Have negotiated Florida Everglades, talk Seminole and Spanish, used to hardships, expert woodsman, follow trails and read wood signs. Many years' military experience, and until Jan. 1, 1913, held rank of 1st Lieut. National Guard. Hold rifle and pistol sharpshooter badge, old and new regulations U. S. Army, and can break a bottle in the air with a revolver. Well up as drill-master, and would like something in this line. Can swim, row, box, scrap; play the piano, banjo and sing; wrestle, shoot a gun, and most anything any one else can do in addition to my profession which is becoming tame at home now, so if there is anything at all doing, somebody write.—Address No. 55.

WANT to join some legitimate expedition where there will be danger and excitement. Have been a soldier and cow-puncher. Twenty-four years old and never been out of U. S. A. Can ride and shoot well and willing to go anywhere.—Address No. 62.

I AM thinking of making a trip *overland* to South America and back. Probably will take two or three years or more to do it, as I don't expect to be in any hurry getting anywhere, my object being adventure. I expect to start on or about the 1st of September, go by boat to the southern part of Mexico and then overland with a burro team on the Pacific Coast to the Straits of Magellan and back on the Atlantic Coast. Probably will take the Amazon country too.

If you know of anybody willing to stand hardships and have plenty of adventure free of cost, let me know, as I am looking for a partner to come along with me. There are only three conditions: 1st, be healthy; 2nd, be a *sticker* (I don't want any quitter); 3rd, furnish his own fare to starting-point, I to take care of financial side of trip after that if he can't do anything, though any help toward that side would be welcome.

I will give you my experiences so as to help you in finding a companion for my trip. Twenty-five years old, weigh 145 lbs., height 5 ft. 6½ in., a foreigner, speak seven languages besides English (fluent Spanish). Left home when twelve years old; have been traveling since, sometimes on the cushions, sometimes on the rods; quite a little overland afoot; have been to every country in Europe with exception of three, to every State in the Union, to Canada and all through Mexico. Have seen service on the battlefield with Mosby in Lower California, Zapata in Southern States, Madero and Orozco in Northern States of Mexico. Have taken part in industrial strikes, understand fairly Socialism, Industrial Unionism and Anarchism. Have had other experiences, which I don't care to put in black and white. Am easy to get along with.

I am working now making a stake that will give us a good start about the first of September. Will make it sooner, if other party has any cash to help along with. Candidates should send full information about themselves with first letter so as to save corresponding time.—Address No. 53.

WANT to go to Central America. Will take a chance on anything that has adventure attached to it. Served in Spanish Army, Loyal Legion at Algiers, Africa. Chinese and Japanese Armies as instructor, and also in Venezuela revolution; in Rough Riders during Spanish American War and then went to Philippines. Have plenty of nerve. Am expert rifleman, and also know how to use machine-guns. Am college graduate, but would rather have excitement and adventure than settle down to business.—Address No. 54.

AM AN Englishman, having graduated abroad. Have been in the flooded districts of Ohio, working for the Red Cross Society. I am anxious for something more exciting. Have been in practise three years. Would like to get into something where adventure, honesty and education would be preferable.—Address Dr. Frederick Norman Oddey, 141 Washington St., Dayton, Ohio.

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